

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Translations between policy and practice : the case of providing positive activities for young people

Thesis

How to cite:

Thomson, Louisa Maynard (2013). Translations between policy and practice : the case of providing positive activities for young people. PhD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2012 The Author



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000d59d>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Translations between policy and practice:

The case of providing positive activities for young people

Louisa Maynard Thomson BA, MA
The Open University Business School

September 2012

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of
The Open University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Date of Submission: 28 September 2012

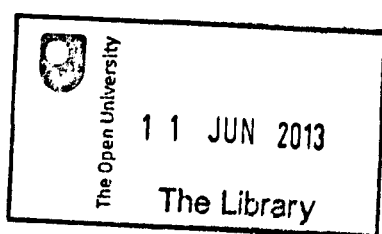
Date of Award: 14 May 2013.

Abstract

The 'interpretive turn' in policy studies has emphasised the unpredictable and often incomplete nature of the policy making process, and helped to focus our attention on the level of practice. The idea of translation is a recent one in the literature, capturing the sense of fluidity and the ongoing interpretation around policy. This thesis examines one particular policy journey through the lens of translation, to evaluate the contributions that the use of this concept can make to understandings of the policy process. There have been very few ethnographies looking at particular sites of policy making and what happens to policy at different levels as it moves from central government to local enactment.

The research has been conducted through a case study approach, taking a particular youth policy from 2007 – *Aiming High for Young People* – which had a controversial goal of increasing the participation of young people in positive activities, and one local authority area. The analysis focussed on the policy texts; what happened to *Aiming High* in practice; the role of practitioners in interpreting new policy; and the local authority processes that all influenced the translation of policy into practice.

The concept of policy in translation has demonstrated that, in this case, the meanings in policy texts are inherently unstable. Translation illuminates the strategies practitioners adopt, how they talk about their work, and the influences and knowledge they draw on. It also emphasises the disconnects and disturbances in the process. Overall, translation advances an understanding of policy work in practice, but with some limitations – in particular around micro processes and routine practices that are part of daily work. The research highlights the need to account for translations more effectively in the policy process in the future.



T 320.6 2012

DONATION

Consultation Copy

YOUR ACCEPTANCE

1 Student details

Your full name: Louisa Maynard Thomson

Personal identifier (PI): A3414385

Affiliated Research Centre (ARC) (if applicable):

Department: Open University Business School

Thesis title: Translations between policy and practice: the case of providing positive activities for young people

2 Authorisation statement

I confirm that I am willing for my thesis to be made available to readers by The Open University Library, and that it may be photocopied, subject to the discretion of the Librarian

Signed: *Louisa Thomson*

Print name: Louisa Thomson

<http://www.open.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/offer-packs.php> 2

3 British Library Authorisation (PhD and EdD candidates only)

Date: 31/05/2013 DD/MM/YY

The Open University has agreed that a copy of your thesis can be made available on loan to the British Library Thesis Service on a voluntary basis. The British Library may make the thesis available online. Please indicate your preference below:

☒ I am willing for The Open University to loan the British Library a copy of my thesis

OR

☐ I do not wish The Open University to loan the British Library a copy of my thesis

Acknowledgments

There have been many people who have supported me during the period of completing this thesis. I must firstly thank my supervisors Professor Rob Paton and Roger Harrison at the Open University for encouraging me throughout and providing constructive help and challenge.

I would also like to thank Tricia Jessiman and Jon Adamson for their support through the National Youth Agency in the early stages of the project – and particularly the latter for the work we have done together since through the Community Research Company.

I must acknowledge the assistance of all those in the case study that helped to set up the fieldwork, and so generously gave their time to be interviewed, and allowed me to observe their work. Without these contributions this thesis would not have been possible.

Many thanks to friends and family who have been there for me during the difficult times of doing a PhD and always offered wise advice and distractions. In particular, to those who gave me much needed peace and quiet at various points during the writing process (my parents, Ellie & John, Steve, Phil & Trey) and those friends who have braved the PhD process ahead of me (Kate, Tom and Heather). Finally, my colleagues on Hackney Council and residents in my ward deserve recognition for being a much needed counterbalance to doing a PhD and keeping me grounded in the real policy world at all times!

Table of contents

		Page
Abstract		2
Acknowledgements		3
Table of contents		4
List of tables		6
List of figures		7
List of abbreviations and acronyms		8
Chapter 1	Introduction	9
1.1	Research aims and objectives	11
1.2	Thesis structure	13
Chapter 2	Investigating policy	16
	Introduction	16
2.1	What is policy?	16
2.2	The policy studies field	17
2.3	Different elements of the policy process	24
2.4	Practice	37
2.5	Translation	44
2.6	A gap in the field?	47
2.7	Conclusion	49
Chapter 3	Methodology	53
	Introduction	53
3.1	Research strategy	54
3.2	Research methods	63
3.3	Research issues	77
3.4	Conclusion	86
Chapter 4	Aiming High in context: governance and policy	88
	Introduction	88
4.1	Understanding governance	89
4.2	Aiming High governance context	91
4.3	Social policy context	103
4.4	Governance challenges under Labour	113
4.5	Redtown context	120
4.6	Conclusion	122
Chapter 5	Understanding policy as text	124
	Introduction	124
5.1	Contexts, authors and readers	125
5.2	Constructions and constitutions around positive activities	136
5.3	Contestations and the reception of Aiming High	149
5.4	Coherence in Aiming High	156
5.5	Conclusion	160

Chapter 6	Translating Aiming High into practice	162
	Introduction	162
6.1	People and places in Redtown	163
6.2	Providing positive activities	165
6.3	Partnership working	172
6.4	The participation of young people in policy processes	180
6.5	Measuring outcomes for young people	185
6.6	Conclusion	190

Chapter 7	The policy work of practitioners	194
	Introduction	194
7.1	Influences and understandings	195
7.2	The strategies of practitioners	207
7.3	The role of practitioners in translation	218
7.4	Conclusion	226

Chapter 8	Local policy processes	229
	Introduction	229
8.1	Discussing policy in meetings	230
8.2	The processes and practices in meetings	233
8.3	Organisations, power and policy actors	244
8.4	A broken service	255
8.5	Conclusion	258

Chapter 9	Conclusion	261
	Introduction	261
9.1	Limitations of the research	262
9.2	The contribution of translation to understanding the policy process	263
9.3	Translation issues	268
9.4	General lessons about the policy relationship	270
9.5	Reflections on the research process	274
9.6	A brief aside on what happened next	276
9.7	Further research	278

Bibliography		280
Appendix		301
1	Excerpt from the original CASE Research studentship proposal	301
2	Research information sheet for participants	304
3	Interviews conducted in the case study area during the fieldwork	306
4	Meetings observed in the case study area during the fieldwork	309

List of tables

	Page
Table 2.1 Summary of the differences between policy as order, and policy as disorder	50
Table 4.1 Labour's youth work policy announcements 1997-2007	104
Table 5.1 The projects, pilots, and future work emerging from <i>Aiming High</i>	128
Table 5.2 Documents from the case study area relevant to positive activities	131
Table 5.3 National standards for positive activities	137
Table 6.1 Different policy trajectories of the main research themes in the case study area	192
Table 7.1 Different positions and strategies towards a new policy	218
Table 9.1 Desirable elements in a policy journey	273

List of figures

	Page
Figure 2.1 The policy studies family	18
Figure 4.1 Positive activities and policy demands	120
Figure 5.1 A linear trail of policy documents	133
Figure 5.2 The circulation of policy documents between central and local levels	134
Figure 6.1 Stakeholder map in the case study area	165
Figure 7.1 The doughnut model of knowledge management	210
Figure 7.2 Learning processes in Redtown	211
Figure 8.1 The policy journey in the case study area	259

List of acronyms and abbreviations

BVPI	Best Value Performance Indicator
CAA	Comprehensive Area Assessment
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CASE	Collaborative Award in Science and Engineering
CC	City Council (in the case study area)
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
CYPP	Children and Young People Plan
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DCSF	Department for Children Schools and Families (2007-2010)
DfE	Department for Education (2010-present)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (1997-2007)
ECM	Every Child Matters
ISH	Integrated Service Hub
IYSS	Integrated Youth Support Strategy
JAR	Joint Area Review
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LGA	Local Government Association
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NCVYS	National Council for Voluntary Youth Services
NI	National Indicator
NPM	New Public Management
NYA	National Youth Agency
PAYP	Positive Activities for Young People (funding stream)
PID	Project Initiation Document
PSA	Public Service Agreement
SMT	Senior Management Team
VCS	Voluntary and community sector
YCF	Youth Capital Fund
YOF	Youth Opportunity Fund

1

Introduction

Introduction

The processes of policy making have been understood as imprecise, contested, and producing outcomes that differ considerably from the intentions set out by politicians and policy makers in policy documents and guidance. An earlier tendency to view policy making as an ordered and sequential process has been overturned. Interpretive policy analysis emphasises instead that:

Understanding 'policy' means understanding the way in which practitioners use it to shape the action'. (Colebatch, 1998: 13)

It is this level of practice that policy researchers in the 'interpretive turn' are seeking to understand. The idea of translation has been proposed as a way of capturing the movement *of* policy, and the movements *around* policy, providing a framework to capture the fluid nature of the policy process, and emphasise the way issues and discourses are constructed and reconstructed between different policy actors (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007). Applying translation to the study of policy emphasises the 'twists and turns by which policy is ultimately produced and performed' (Freeman et al, 2011: 130).

The challenge of exploring the worlds of practitioners and understanding what they actually do in their everyday work has been acknowledged (Griggs, Freeman, Farrelly and Freeman, 2009). How does policy enable, shape and legitimate particular

courses of action? What role do practitioners play in interpreting new policies on the ground? How can the influences, understandings and disturbances in the processes around policy be captured and understood? The aim of this research is to examine whether the idea of translation helps advance an understanding of the texts, practices and processes of policy.

This research started with a particular youth policy under the Labour Government that was in power from 1997 to 2010: *Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities* (2007). At the centre of *Aiming High* was the policy goal of ensuring that more young people were participating in positive activities in their local areas. *Aiming High* aimed to transform leisure time opportunities, activities and support services for young people, building on previous youth policy statements that increasingly placed positive activities at the centre. However, the centrality of positive activities in the government's thinking was contested. They were rejected by some in the youth sector as further evidence of a threat to the kind of youth work practice that involved voluntary relationships with young people, built up over time. They were part of a distinctly Labour preoccupation with evidencing improved outcomes for young people.

Aiming High was published at a time when the changing role of the local state was evident – with local authorities expected to work with partners from different sectors, and ensure that users of services had more say in how they were run. Youth workers were being placed in these new spaces of local governance, having to adapt to multi-agency situations and practices. Precise targets were also set for local authorities to embed young people in decision making processes around the local youth offer being provided in their areas.

It is at the local level that policy processes 'can be investigated first hand and in face to face detail' (Jenkins, 2007: 34), and where the relationships between discourses,

practices, and dilemmas can be examined (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007). This thesis aims to explore these processes, and to examine in detail what happens to policy as it moves from central government to the local level, and at the level of practice. With the challenges around *Aiming High* in mind, this research focussed on one particular urban area as a case study to investigate what the policy journey around *Aiming High* involved - from its bold, ten year statement; to the articulation of positive activities in local authority documents; to the negotiations, interactions and views of practitioners; and the local processes that were in place to bring a new policy into being.

1.1 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This research is supported by an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Collaborative Award in Science and Engineering (CASE) studentship in partnership with the National Youth Agency (NYA). CASE studentships have now been discontinued, but were designed to bring an academic approach to a specific research issue relevant for the sponsoring organisation. When this research started, the NYA was a developmental agency partly funded by government, focussed on influencing youth policy and improving services to secure the best outcomes for young people. The original proposal was compiled in 2008 by Prof Rob Paton and Roger Harrison at the Open University in partnership with the NYA (Appendix 1). This acknowledged the changing policy context for youth policy – and in particular, the interest in the policy goal of providing positive activities for young people. The proposal identified that there were a variety of stakeholders involved in developing an offer of positive activities in a local area, and understanding the interactions between these stakeholders and how they reached shared understandings was the central research question.

Although CASE studentships provide the researcher with opportunities and access to resources, collaborative research also means that there are two separate audiences to

consider throughout. Reflecting the NYA's support for the thesis, the research was designed as a case study, with the aim of drawing conclusions and practical lessons on the challenges of *Aiming High*. An ethnographic approach was adopted, suitable for the complexities of researching in organisations, and examining the perspectives and interactions of the different policy stakeholders.

One of the challenges of researching an active policy area is that the political and policy context is liable to shift - particularly given the length of time that doctoral research covers. The original focus of this thesis altered throughout the research period. This was partly driven by the pragmatics of accessing practitioners, managers and politicians in the field, but once the fieldwork had started, it became apparent that the changing national context would influence the research. *Aiming High* was a Labour policy, and had reducing significance at a local level as the fieldwork progressed, when in 2010, the reality of a change of government and public spending cuts became apparent. The interactions around *Aiming High* became less of a focal point, and instead the scope broadened to understand the idea of policy translation between central and local government, and between managers and practitioners at a local level into practice – with *Aiming High* being used as an example to illustrate these processes.

The study aims to address the following question:

- **What does the concept of translation contribute to understandings of policy making and practice?**

Objectives:

- To explore the different aspects of the 'policy journey' around *Aiming High*: in policy texts; in the practices of practitioners; and in local policy processes in the case study area
- To examine the perspectives, interactions and negotiations of policy actors involved in making policy happen – including practitioners and managers in the case study area
- To evaluate whether the idea of policy translation helps to understand these different aspects of policy work as it is enacted at a local level

The contribution this research seeks to make is through in depth engagement with how a particular policy is translated into practice. Although translation has been emphasised in the interpretive policy field, there have been few ethnographies of a policy using its lens to illuminate the policy journey, and understanding what role policy actors play at different levels within the process. In this way, the research contributes to the developing strand of work in the interpretive policy studies field on interrogating what practitioners actually do and the messy reality of policy making. The wider aspiration is that lessons can then be drawn for policy making in general with greater consideration of the dynamics between central and local government.

1.2 THESIS STRUCTURE

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework on which this thesis is based. The field of policy studies is introduced, with an emphasis on the importance of interpretive policy analysis for this research. Various aspects of the policy process are explored in

more detail and the ways in which these have been conceptualised in the policy literature – including, texts, policy actors, the role of ideas, policy networks and organisations. The notion of ‘practice’ is also discussed, and finally, Freeman’s (2009) work on applying translation to policy is introduced.

Chapter 3 explains the methodological approach in this study, and its location in the traditions of qualitative research. It justifies the use of a case study approach, as well as the criteria used to select an area of study. Different ethnographic approaches are discussed, and the core research methods for this research introduced – documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews, and meeting observations. Finally, some of the challenges and issues that arose during the research, primarily relating to researching in organisational environments are explored.

Chapter 4 explores the policy and governance context around *Aiming High*, responding to calls in the interpretive policy analysis literature to pay close attention to this area when analysing policy. The origins of *Aiming High* are discussed, along with the policy and governance concerns that underpinned much of Labour’s policy during this time. From this, key research themes – positive activities, partnership, engaging people in delivering services and outcomes – are identified as the issues that guided the fieldwork. The context of the case study location is also introduced.

Chapter 5 is the first empirical chapter to explore different aspects of translation in the policy process. *Aiming High* and local policy documents from the case study area are analysed as ‘policy as text’. Issues around authorship, audience, the use of evidence and the construction of ideas to persuade and convince are considered. The translation of the policy goal into local texts is discussed to help understand the movement of policy between the national and local level.

Chapter 6 presents the empirical findings from the case study area based around the four research themes to explore what **'policy in practice'** looks like. The aim is to challenge the linear implementation of policy by showing that what happened to *Aiming High* as it was interpreted on the ground. The argument is put forward that there is a **'weak translation'** of the national policy, with inconsistency across the case study area and a disconnect between the national and local level.

Chapter 7 returns to a more analytical approach to the data, in order to understand the **role and influence of practitioners** in the policy process, at the level of practice. The strategies that practitioners employ to make sense of new policies are explored, as well as the influences and understandings they bring to their work. The views of practitioners on the way that policy moves between central and local government also shows the limits that they sometimes experienced in interpreting new policies. This chapter discusses some of the difficulties in applying the idea of translation to the policy work of practitioners.

In Chapter 8, the analysis focuses on **'policy as processes'** - the role of managers and meetings at the strategic level in the case study, and their influences on the way that new policies are adopted and translated. The sites of these interactions, the influence of the local authority as an organisation and the power relations at play between key policy actors are all explored. The findings are then used to map the **'policy journey'** in the case study to understand where translation processes are most apparent, and where policy became lost in translation.

Chapter 9 is the concluding chapter and summarises the findings from the research on how translation operated through text, practice and local processes. It presents some closing thoughts on whether translation helps to capture the policy journey around *Aiming High*, and the implications and impact of the research are considered. Finally, areas for future research are suggested.

2

Investigating policy

Introduction

Colebatch states: 'policy analysis is not a way of solving a problem, but of carrying on a conversation about it' (2007:11). This chapter provides an analysis of some of the core ideas about policy and contemporary debates in the field of interpretive policy studies in order to outline how policy might be understood. It is not a systematic review of the policy studies field or organisational processes, and instead the focus is on situating interpretive policy studies in the literature. Different elements of the policy process are then explored, including policy texts, the role of ideas, policy networks, organisational culture and practice. The idea of translation is introduced as a way of drawing a common thread through an interpretive approach to policy. Authors in the interpretive policy tradition have also stressed the importance of understanding what policy makers do and interrogating particular sites of policy and practice. These ideas form the analytical frame for this thesis, in order to examine the contribution of translation as a concept for understanding policy processes.

2.1 WHAT IS POLICY?

There is a tendency to take for granted the meaning of 'policy' as a term. It can be seen as a statement of intent from politicians or a plan of action in a particular field or organisation (Colebatch, 1998). There is an obvious interest in examining what politicians say they are going to do and the policy solutions they are offering. Budd et al (2006) propose two aspects of 'making policy happen' – a justification and

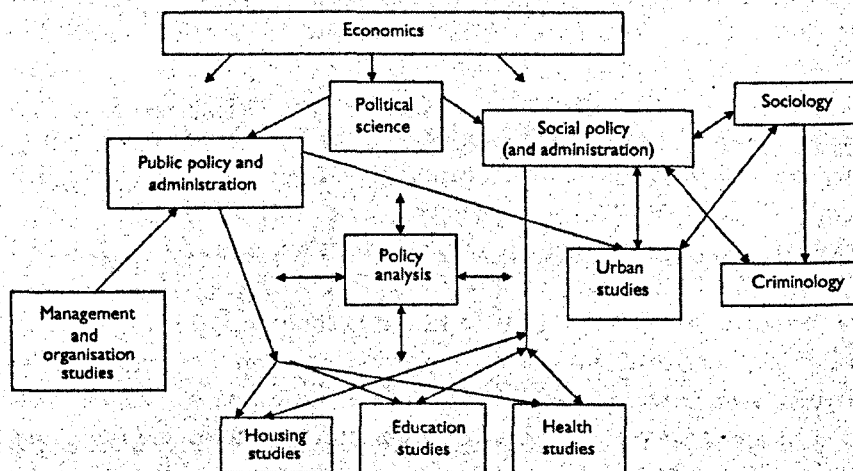
direction for initiatives; and implementation through designing and developing programmes and services. This implies that policy is definitive and explicit – it defines what the issue is, offers a solution and sets out a plan, indicating what needs to happen next.

However, many researchers in the policy field have highlighted that policy is in fact elusive, problematic, implicit and diverse – and it is not easy to even define what it is that policy researchers analyse (eg Fischer, 2003; Laws & Hajer, 2006). Rather than accepting the policy statement at face value, researchers need to understand what led to the policy in terms of its context and history and how it was produced, and then the ongoing processes around the policy that have been set in motion. In this sense, policy is a process as well as an outcome (Colebatch, 1998).

2.2 THE POLICY STUDIES FIELD

Alongside the difficulties in defining policy, there is also some ambiguity about the policy studies field. As Hodgson and Irving (2007) highlight, there are many disciplines that have an interest in policy. They positioned their book – *Policy Reconsidered* – as sitting uncomfortably within literatures on policy analysis, policy process, public administration and social policy. This is an issue for this thesis: it takes as an example a specialist field (youth policy) which sits within a wider field of social policy and governance (as Chapter 4 investigates); but it is also about the processes of public policy and therefore needs to consider the literature on policy as a whole. Although these are not covered in any great depth in this literature review, policy processes also involve considering elements of organisation and management studies. Figure 2.1 below reveals this patterned policy field:

Figure 2.1: The policy studies family



Source: Hodgson and Irving, 2007:4

Whilst navigating through this, in an attempt to situate this thesis, it is necessary to briefly trace the development of policy studies from the initial preoccupation with a rational process, to an appreciation of the iterative and negotiated meanings involved in policy – as it is this latter approach that has influenced my research.

2.2.1 Early approaches to policy studies

In the 1960s, policy analysis studies largely originated from America, and tended to focus on the role of governments, how policy made the agenda and how decisions were made (Fischer, 2003). This view of policy was largely technocratic, and some of the central ideas were around *rational decision making* where policy actors at the top identify a problem, formulate a goal and objective, and give instructions which express what will be done in a particular area as a solution (Colebatch, 1998).

Institutionalism was another idea – the formal routines, structures and norms in institutions that effect and constrain human action, and the impact this has on policy change in terms of either adapting to particular interests or promoting institutional reform (John, 2006). The aim of these approaches was to translate social issues into

‘technically defined ends to be pursued through administrative means’, and to find more effective and efficient means of achieving policy goals (Fischer, 2003: 4).

During the 1960s and 1970s, when policy solutions were perceived to be failing, there was a shift in research to examining policy implementation and evaluating policy outcomes to understand why certain programmes had not worked. For example, an early implementation study that is often quoted in the policy studies literature is Pressman and Wildavsky’s (1973) account of why policy goals formed in Washington had little relation to what happened on the ground in California. These drew attention to the factors that undermined ‘perfect administration’ such as the diversity of goals and the large number of people involved in the process. The focus was on understanding the structures, channels of communication and controlling mechanisms that meant implementing organisations could effect outcomes.

Early implementation studies were based on the assumption that implementation was unproblematic if bureaucracies were more subservient to the policy goals from above (Fischer, 2003). The idea of implementation itself has since been criticised as the notion that organisations act as servants of government has been overturned (Friedman, 2006). Hodgwood and Gunn (1998) propose a number of reasons why implementation might not be possible, such as physical obstacles that are beyond the control of administrators; inadequate time and resources and the simple fact that a policy might be a bad one and unable to solve the problem it was designed to.

A later wave of implementation studies then looked at the role of discretion within organisations, in recognition of the influence of practitioners on policy at their level within the policy process. Lipsky (1980) used the phrase ‘street level bureaucrats’ to describe workers in organisations, and looked at why organisations were performing in ways that contradicted their own rules and goals. Lipsky found that ‘the decisions of street level bureaucrats, the routines they establish and the devices they invent to

cope with uncertainties and work pressures, effectively become the public policies they carry out' (ibid.: 389). This 'bottom up approach' to implementation was significant as it focussed attention on the level where services are provided (Friedman, 2006) and opened up the possibility that the actions of lower level actors in the policy process could influence and alter policies (Hogwood and Gunn, 1998).

One of the main criticisms of implementation studies which focus on the work of those 'on the ground', is that they treat 'implementation' as being separate, whereas it has been argued that it should be seen as part of the policy making process (Colebatch, 1998). The focus solely on the discretion of frontline workers risks too much attention being paid to that level of policy making, overlooking the way that policy interacts vertically, between the top down and bottom up levels, but also horizontally between those inside the organisation and outside it involving collective negotiation (ibid.). Newman (2009) has argued that the concept of a 'street level bureaucrat' is not helpful as it implies that nothing happens in between a policy decision and the frontline – and it is only at the level of practice that discretion happens. However, Durose (2011) maintains the value in Lipsky's work is in understanding why policies that practitioners carry out are not the same as the intentions that came from the centre.

This is a simplified account of these developments in the policy studies field, but the aim here is to show what the preoccupations were of policy researchers prior to the 'interpretive turn'.

2.2.2 The interpretive turn in policy studies

Fischer (2003) states that there is no single post empiricist position in policy studies, but there is a growing body of literature, drawing on discursive, narrative and argumentative contributions which can be described as an 'interpretive turn' in

policy analysis, public administration and organisational studies (eg: Colebatch, 1998; Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Bevir and Rhodes, 2006). These authors have criticised rational and institutionalist approaches to policy studies for understanding policy and action as being coherent, hierarchical and linear (Colebatch, 1998), and showing little interest in assessing how accurate these processes were in terms of explaining the work of government. Other authors have argued that the role of values and ideology in policy are not accounted for in the idea of an efficient means-ends relationship (Jenkins, 2007) and that the focus on rationality overlooks day-to-day practices, internal processes and relational struggles (Pritzlaff and Nullmeier, 2011).

How is policy viewed and understood in the 'interpretive turn'? The start of this chapter attempted to define policy as a term, appreciating that it is often imprecise, and interpretive analysts see the policy process as being far from straightforward. It involves understanding that 'the outcome of state actions is always uncertain and fallible' (Painter, 2006: 761). Policy can be treated with 'anthropological strangeness' with the researcher interrogating what the policy is, what it does and what it means (Jenkins, 2007). Policy is viewed as both *active and interactive*, and *fluid and complex* - involving many actors, many different spaces and complex processes of knowledge production (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007).

An interpretive approach to policy analysis can be summarised as involving a focus on the *beliefs and values* of those involved; the importance of the work of *language and discourse* in policy; and the *social construction of meaning*. Instead of viewing those involved in the policy process as rational and objective, interpretive approaches recognise that beliefs and practices are constitutive of each other (Bever and Rhodes, 2006). Whereas some political scientists have divorced beliefs and meanings from actions, interpretive approaches argue that these form holistic webs and researchers need to understand and explore the means through which people construct their

world (ibid.). Understandings of policy cannot be separated from the cultural context of policy, and therefore values and ideology require attention.

Language is central in interpretive approaches as policy and political processes are essentially communicative and linguistic (Fairclough, 2000). The 'argumentative turn' in the literature stressed that 'language doesn't just mirror reality; it actively shapes the way we perceive and understand it' (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003: 14).

Therefore the way language constructs policy needs to be understood, exploring the struggles to create shared meanings between policy actors, institutions and analysts (Fischer, 2003). Policy itself is concerned with 'the formation and maintenance of interpretation' (Colebatch, 2007: 2). Interpretive analysis helps to make visible the processes of production and performance in policy making – policy is not just a product that comes from people or organisations, but an argument made for a particular course of action, which is open ended and imprecise (Jenkins, 2007). Meaning is contested, continually re-invented, and with each reading new meanings are brought to policy and created out of it (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007).

The differences between empiricist and interpretive approaches imply different analytical approaches which reflect wider debates in the social sciences about the nature of knowledge and are not exclusive to the policy studies field. Earlier approaches in policy studies sit broadly within a modernist ontology with a belief in an external reality, and epistemology where 'truth' can be uncovered through reliable measurement.

The interpretive turn in policy studies have more in common with social constructionist and postmodern perspectives, which see social and political life as embedded in a web of social meanings, produced and reproduced through discursive practices (Fischer, 2003). Colebatch provides two useful summaries of

approaches to policy that move beyond the idea of policy involving authoritative 'crisp choices'. These are:

- *structured interaction* – where the focus is on the wide range of participants in the policy process with diverse agendas and values, and collective action has to be created and sustained
- *Social construction* – which looks at the frameworks that shape understanding about policy, seeing it as 'being 'made' by a much broader pattern of social practice than the formal activity of designated 'policy makers' (2007: 3)

It is also worth drawing attention to the structure/agency debates that influence different schools of thought within the policy studies field. Top down approaches to decision making, administration and implementation tend to privilege structure; whereas interpretive approaches stress the agency of individuals in the policy making process. However, this division does not involve making a choice between structure or agency, and authors within the interpretive approach have analysed the policy making process with both the role of institutions and the actions of practitioners in mind. As Bevir and Rhodes explain, interpretive approaches can cause problems for analysts as the greater the emphasis is on contingency and particularly of beliefs, it can be harder to explain them as a social process. They introduce the idea of 'situated agency' – recognising that 'social influences permeate beliefs and actions even when actors do not recognise such influence' (2006: 5). John explains this as:

It might seem bland to say that institutions, socioeconomic processes, networks, choices and ideas interact with each other, but it is a truer statement than saying that one of these processes drives the others (2006, 13).

Hajer and Wagenaar (2003) have stated that interpretive approaches tend to be at the margins of policy studies, and Colebatch (2007) has similarly highlighted how policy text books and teaching tend to privilege the dominant paradigm of instrumental choice. Bevir and Rhodes (2006) suggest that there have been many misconceptions about interpretive approaches to policy studies, with accusations that the analysis is subjective, impressionistic and incapable of producing policy relevant knowledge. The methodology chapter of this thesis will explain in more detail the relation of epistemology and ontology to the methods and approach adopted in the fieldwork and some of the issues with the status of this knowledge.

2.3 DIFFERENT ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY PROCESS

There are many aspects of policy that have been written about within the 'interpretive turn' in policy studies. This section highlights some of the key ideas around *policy texts, policy actors, the role of ideas, policy networks and organisations* that influence and inform the analysis in this thesis.

2.3.1 Policy texts

Policy documents, in the most straightforward sense, are marks and words on paper (Freeman and Maybin, 2011). They can appear in the form of laws, guidelines, written and oral statements, press releases, research documents, strategies, presentations – and more. They are produced for both an internal audience of managers and practitioners, but also an external audience of a wider policy community (and the general public) that might take an interest in the direction being proposed in the document. They are part of the essential work of government and formalise its processes – representing problems as 'questions and positions, interpreting and converting them into decisions, programmes and instruments' (Freeman, 2009: 431).

An interpretive approach to policy documents encourages attention to the problem being presented. As Harrison (2011) explains that policy frames priorities, and tells us about ‘what really matters to people at the time; about values; the nature of the changes people are seeking to achieve; about expectations and what is thought possible and achievable’. The policy text draws selectively on different pieces of knowledge from past experiences, skills, existing legislation and resources (Kothari et al, 2009), referencing ideas, understandings and standpoints which seek to position the reader and achieve consent for the proposal being made. Policy documents might appear finished, or be presented as a completed statement of ideas and actions, but there are many ideas, projects, compromises and justifications within the text (Newman, 2009).

In their analysis of policy research, Freeman and Maybin (2011) found that the majority of researchers focussed on the content of documents – looking at how the policy problem is conceptualised, and whether the proposed policy is likely to be effective. These researchers tended to view language as a neutral transmitter of meanings contained in the text. In common with discourse analysts, Freeman and Maybin suggest that this approach risks separating the text from the way it is produced and reproduced. However, they propose that researchers need to go beyond looking at the discourses documents evoke, to emphasise *further* the ‘work of construction’ that the text itself does. Their framework is a call to look at the spaces between and around documents – how they are written, read, produced and received, and to understand that there is work in the document that goes back and forth. Freeman and Maybin’s ideas are powerful in helping to appreciate that a document is active – connecting people, co-ordinating actions, and creating new categories – and its work should not be taken for granted.

The idea that 'the document is always plural, not merely multiple, but multiplying' (Freeman and Maybin, 2011: 162), encourages an understanding that the policy recommendation in a document is not the final point (Freeman, 2006b). Documents are part of the ongoing translation work around policy, which is iterative and dynamic, suggesting more writing, interpretation and actions over time, and across organisational boundaries (Freeman, 2006b). The construction of meaning goes on and is not restricted to the period when the text is written - documents are the basis for more documents, and further discussion. For example, a national policy text can lead to a plethora of local documents that are circulated amongst practitioners and local policy makers.

In a digitalised world, policy moves across time and space and the idea of a physical policy document can seem outdated. The work of government is available on the internet, with archived sites of previous government departments making policy readily available, even when it has long been superseded by newer statements and strategies. The majority of documents analysed as part of this research were accessed online and downloaded as pdfs, whereas in the past, hard copies would have had to be tracked down in specialist libraries. The digitalisation of policy documents serves to further the reach of government to a wider audience and preserves its work for scrutiny, easily accessible to researchers and other audiences. They are part of a wider system of circulation and exchange (Atkinson and Coffey, 1997), and both construct and negotiate social space (Brown and Duguid, 2006: 1).

2.3.2 Policy actors

Traditional policy studies focussed on the role of decision makers at the top, whereas there is now an acknowledgement of the many different people and groups that play a role in the policy process and are involved in policy work. In this thesis, 'policy actors' refers to all those who can be seen as 'policy makers' – from practitioners at

the frontline to politicians in government. Barrett describes the link between policy making and implementation as 'a policy-action dialectic involving negotiating and bargaining between those seeking to put policy into effect and those upon whom action depends' (2006: 20). This captures the sense of policy making involving an interplay between various actors at different levels of government (Bovaird and Loffler, 2003; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2006).

The literature draws attention to the fact that politicians still tend to be the most visible in the policy process. They have a particular authority on the basis of being there by right (Colebatch, 1998). They can mobilise the political will needed to bring in changes – either based on ideology, the need to improve something that was done previously, or create new structures and institutions to bring about change (Potter and Subrahaim, 1998). Politicians play a role in leadership, policy making, strategy and building partnerships (Bovaird and Loffler, 2003), but there are also 'non officials' involved – agencies, think tanks, academics, interest groups, political parties and the media – operating within civil society (Jenkins, 2007). Given that policy is essentially intended to solve problems, the role of these actors is to offer expertise, advice, criticisms and lobby on particular policy areas. This is useful in appreciating that 'policy is the work of many hands' (Colebatch, 1998: 89). Rather than assuming that public policy is the prerogative of government, this helps to show the other actors who seek change (Friedman, 2006). Colebatch (1998) distinguishes between insiders and outsiders, and the fact that specialists and advisers have to negotiate their right to be part of the policy process, and not everyone with a 'seat at the table' is there on an equal basis.

There are a further set of policy actors which receive less attention in the interpretive policy studies literature, but are a vital part of the context of this research – local politicians and local policy makers. Local politicians set the broad parameters for policy decisions locally (for example, through budget setting), and their values and

ideologies influence this, alongside their accountability to local communities (Gunn, 2008). Managers in local authorities have direct influence over how a department works and are powerful in the policy making process as they also provide local elected politicians with information that is used to make overarching policy decisions (ibid.). Munro et al (2008) examined the role of public managers as 'dual intermediaries', where in contrast to the traditional model where officials act as the servants of their political masters, they found that this group were active and creative 'institutional entrepreneurs who could shape and change their environments' (2008: 69).

Alongside politicians and managers – junior level staff and practitioners are also policy actors and part of making policy happen at a local level. Both central government and local government staff have a deep involvement in policy changes and the way they are implemented (Milbourne, 2009). Painter expresses this particularly powerfully: 'passing legislation has few effects until it is 'produced in practice through the myriad mundane actions of officials, clerks, police officers, inspectors, teachers, social workers, doctors and so on' (2006: 761). Newman (2009) has highlighted how policy managers and officers interpret policy, but are also its originators. This implies that staff at a local level do more than merely interpret policy – they interact with it, and bring it into action with new meanings and directions. This is a key idea for this thesis and the idea of 'practice' will be explored further later in this chapter.

2.3.3 The role of ideas

One of the concerns in the field of public policy studies has been to look at where ideas come from and the process of policy change. These approaches examine the effects of knowledge on public policy, and the claims about the origins and solutions to social problems (John, 2006). In terms of the *origins* of policy, processes of decision

making are central, but the components of this are not always obvious (Smith and May, 1980). A decision can be a way to connect events and communicate between people (Rhodes, 2006), creating coherence in the face of ambiguity and contest (Colebatch, 1998). Before this, there is negotiation that takes place that is the result of interactions between different actors and ideas (Colebatch, 1998; Löffler, 2003; Freeman, 2008b).

One idea that has been influential within policy analysis is Hall's (1993) work on paradigm shifts to show how policy changes. During periods of normal policy making, the paradigm is unchallenged. First order change is when policy is modified, but the instruments themselves remain unchanged. Second order change is when the settings and instruments are altered (such as the development of new policy institutions and plans), but in the context of stable goals. In periods of 'exceptional' policy making there is third order change – a major paradigm shift with new forms of policy.

Dwyer and Ellison (2009) have suggested that this is a useful way of showing the role of policy actors in framing policies ideologically, and Freeman (2008a) highlights how paradigm shifts help explain why a policy community learns to think differently and shows the relationship between ideas and institutions. However, Dwyer and Ellison also state that in a contemporary context, learning is less driven by the agency of politicians and bureaucrats than Hall's framework suggests – primarily because there are many other factors to take into account such as the origins of particular policies, the pressure to implement specific measures and structural constraints (2009: 391).

Another dominant idea has been around 'transfer' which looks at how knowledge about policies, institutions and administration in one time or place, is used in another (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996). Dwyer and Ellison (2009) outline how ideas around

policy transfer have centred on three levels – micro (between individuals); meso (between networks and communities); and macro (across time and space). They then argue the idea of policy transfer is too linear, and disguises the multiple influences on policy making – particularly at the micro and meso levels, where a range of potential sources of learning exist.

One alternative to the idea of policy transfer is Kingdon's model of policy streams. His work aims to answer the question 'what makes an idea's time come?' (1995: 1). Kingdon examines how governmental agendas are set, and highlights different streams in the policy process. *Problems* are recognised and defined, causing certain subjects to rise on the agenda. *Policy* proposals are developed 'according to their own incentives and selection criteria, whether or not they are solutions to problems' (ibid.: 201). Meanwhile the *political* streams mean that agendas can change and a new administration can lose interest in problems that are not amongst its high priorities. When the three streams join, there is a 'policy window', and opportunities for policy advocates and 'entrepreneurs' to push their problems and solutions, and 'move packages of the three joined elements up on decision agendas' (ibid.: 204). When there is a 'policy window', there are 'hidden participants' of specialists and administrators who have a key role in influencing the alternatives to the proposed agenda. Beebeejaun et al suggest that Kingdon's model is powerful in explaining the prominence at certain times of 'well-bounded problems and policy response' (2012: 5).

The idea of an incremental approach to policy making involving 'muddling through' has also been proposed (Lindblom, 1979). Dwyer and Ellison (2009) feel that this has been underplayed in the literature, in favour of rational decision making. In their analysis of New Labour's 'rights and responsibilities' approach and the extent to which this was 'transferred' from the US, they state that 'we nicked stuff from all over the place'. Rather than a rational process, there was 'a protracted series of

interactions among individuals and networks, both inside and outside the formal state' (ibid.: 403). They propose that policy making is increasingly chaotic and pluralised, where information can easily be accessed, and the demand is for more individualised and customised policy solutions.

It is useful to see policy ideas and change in this way – recognising that it is an active and interactive process, but that there are some aspects of the process that are beyond the control of actors. It also helps to highlight how policy making can be an unpredictable process, with opportunities emerging on a more ad hoc basis. This idea will be applied further in the analysis chapters when examining the influences on practitioners, and the extent to which borrowing and assembling ideas captures the formation of *Aiming High* as a policy.

2.3.4 Policy networks

Hodgson and Irving (2007) suggest that there have been changes at all levels of politics and practice at the end of the 20th century, and many authors have written about the shift from government to governance (eg: Bevir and Rhodes, 2003; Hoggett, 2006; Klijn and Skelcher, 2007; Pierre, 2009). A conventional view of government is focussed on the authority and superiority of the state as a locus of power (Pierre and Peters, 2006a).

In contrast, contemporary governance is seen as being decentred and diffuse, characterised by networks, a range of actors and processes of deliberation. State authority and power are emphasised much less and policy delivery takes place across the public and private sectors, and civil society (Fairclough, 2000; Pierre and Peters, 2006a). The boundaries of organisations become more fluid, and governance involves multi level forms of coordination (Budd et al, 2006). Hajer and Wagenaar

suggest that governance can help 'practitioners and theorists alike to unlearn embedded intellectual reflexes and break out of tacit patterns of thinking' (2003: 2).

Policy networks have been identified as one of the defining features of the new governance arrangements (Pierre, 2009). There are definitional issues around networks and a tendency to use the term interchangeably with partnership, alliance, collaboration, joint working (Powell and Exworthy, 2002), or as a generic term that includes governments, policy communities and epistemic communities (Rhodes, 2006). Interaction and negotiation are also central to networks - actors in networks may have their own goals and strategies, but are also dependent on each other in order to achieve the public policy outcome they are working towards (Löffler, 2003). Pierre and Peters (2006a) have also highlighted the role of 'moving out' in governance processes, where other institutions are now fulfilling government functions. In broad terms, policy networks are a system for deliberation, decision and implementation (Klijn and Skelcher, 2007), between the boundaries of state and society (Newman, 2002).

A number of issues with decision making through policy networks have been raised. One concern is that due to the fluid nature of networks, they can lack transparency over how policy decisions are taken (Sterling, 2005). Munro et al (2008) have also questioned the extent to which new collaborative spaces beyond representative government are accountable, given that they can lack constitutions and governance obligations, focussing instead of policy delivery.

Ideas around policy networks are helpful in the context of this research on many levels. It encourages a focus on the interactions between policy actors - citizens, analysts and decision makers - and seeing the way decisions are 'increasingly shaped by the discourses of policy experts rather than elected officials' (Fischer, 2003: 15). Bevir and Rhodes (2006) have also argued governance has no essential properties,

and encourage researchers to look at specific cases rather than aiming for a comprehensive account across different policies. Their approach is encouraging a shift from looking for ways to improve the ability of the state to manage networks and hierarchies in the policy making process, and instead look at particular sites of policy making – something that this thesis aims to do by focussing on one policy case study.

2.3.5 Organisational culture

The field of organisation studies is largely beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is useful to explore a few ideas around organisational culture, and the nature of local authorities as organisations to understand the context that policy makers and practitioners are often operating in. It has been suggested that there is no consensus over the meaning of culture, but that it helps to explain the ‘orderliness and patterning of much of our life experience’ (Smircich, 1983: 341). Culture captures a particular way of life amongst people or a community (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006: 177), and is something that is perceived or felt (Handy, 1993: 191). It turns our attention to ‘phenomena that are below the surface, that are powerful in their impact but invisible’ (Schein, 2004: 8).

In the context of organisation studies, the importance of studying organisational culture has been emphasised. This involves considering the distinctive climate, practices, values and characteristics that are commonly held in an organisation and guide behaviour (Martin, 2002; Schein, 2004), as well as ‘the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one organisation from another’ (Hofstede, 1991: 180). The literature on organisational culture is diverse, crossing different disciplines (Martin, 2002). Interpretive approaches to studying organisations are most relevant to this thesis, as they have highlighted how individuals and groups make sense of organisational life, and the construction of

shared meanings and experiences (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). These realities are then open to reinterpretation and renegotiation (Smircich, 1983). This can entail seeing organisations as being continuously socially constructed and reconstructed through interactions, rather than the organisation being a system at a level above the individuals within it (Stacey and Griffin, 2005). Understanding organisational culture at this level, involves attention to not only the visible artifacts that can be seen, but espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions and norms that are taken for granted (Schein, 2004). A cultural analysis encourages these to be questioned and surfaced (Smircich, 1983).

Organisational culture can be seen abstract, but it has behavioural and attitudinal consequences (Schein, 2004). Alvesson has outlined the importance of organisational culture in 'governing the understanding of behaviour, social events, institutions and processes' (2002: 4). In this view, there are shared rules governing aspects of organisational life, but these are not just inside people's heads, and are instead expressed in the interactions between people in the organisation. He advocates a practical hermeneutic approach, understanding the meanings, symbolism and ideas of the organisation – but particularly the socially shared ones. What is of interest for this thesis is the idea of negotiation within organisations – and how individuals construct their organisational reality. This focuses on the utterances, stories, rituals and interactions – the 'taken for granted ideas, beliefs, meanings that are necessary for continued organisational activity' (Alvesson, 2002: 2).

The idea of professional culture is also important when considering the different aspects of organisational culture. Professional culture involves specialist skills, knowledge, power and codes which often have an ideological significance and associations outside of the organisation (Bloor & Dawson, 1994). Access is restricted as it requires specific training. It can also mean that people are prepared for their own profession, but not necessarily how to communicate with other professions,

leading to silos (Hall, 2005). Professional identity involves internalised values, that are incorporated into an individual's world view deriving from their professional status (ibid.). Professional identity is significant as it influences what people might perceive, feel and think about their organisations values and characteristics (Martin, 2002).

Employees are members of other cultures and communities outside the workplace which also influences their values and identity (Bloor & Dawson, 1994; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). These can change as members of an organisation develop their own shared history and assumptions (Schein, 2004). However, changing the values of people within organisations can be difficult - Hofstede (1991) highlights how individuals tend to adapt to the culture of a new context, but when entire groups move, the culture of that group follows. In the case study, these ideas will be considered further to explore the influence of professional identity, shared understandings and the impact of organisational structures and practices on actions and behaviour (Bloor & Dawson, 1994).

The majority of the fieldwork took place in a local authority, which is an important organisational context for the research.¹ Handy (1993) has outlined four main types of culture in organisations: power – where the organisation is small and dependent on a central source of power; role – where rules and procedures are the main form of influence; task – with a project orientated adaptable culture; and person – where the individual is the central point. Public sector organisations have traditionally been seen as top down and hierarchical (Barrett, 2006), or outmoded and inefficient (Hoggett, 2006). During the 1980s, New Public Management (NPM) administrative reforms became prominent in public administration, redefining the state as having a regulatory role, rather than a steering and intervening one (Pierre, 2009). The aim was to make the public sector more efficient, competitive and responsive, in order to

¹ It is important to note that local authorities are not single organisations, and have permeable boundaries – an idea that will be explored in more detail in the methodology chapter.

address dissatisfaction with its productivity (Powell and Exworthy, 2002; Bovaird and Loffler, 2003). Management techniques were borrowed from the private sector to increase value for money, secure continuous improvement and tighter budget control (Bovaird and Loffler, 2003; Pollitt, 2006). NPM consisted of a greater role for managers at the expense of politicians - whilst politicians are still held to account through democratic processes, their role shifted to one of defining long term objectives, rather than day to day management (Pierre, 2009). NPM also aimed to make public administration closer to customers and more decentralised (Kernaghan, 2006; Pollit, 2006).

Kernaghan (2006) argues that there have been tensions with the application of business values and practices in the public sector jarring with values such as integrity and neutrality. Pollit (2006) has suggested that, within the limited data available evaluating NPM, there is some evidence of success from the reforms, with downsizing, and services becoming more sympathetic to users. However, local authorities tend to still be viewed as unwieldy and bureaucratic in their approach – for example, Tichelar and Watts found ‘Weberian features of hierarchy of authority, chain of command and regulated communication’ (2000: 224) in their work in local authorities. It is probably overly simplistic to categorise all local authorities as Weberian, and local government reform that has taken place since Tichelar and Watt’s study (which will be discussed in Chapter 4), could be seen as an attempt to address some of the tensions around hierarchical structures, accountability and efficiency.

Hoggett (2006) provides an alternative perspective on public sector organisations by suggesting that bureaucracy is as a necessity for effective government. Given that public bureaucracies are funded by public money and publicly agreed priorities, fairness and impartiality are dominant principles. However, these ideas are not given, and public organisations fulfil a specific role as sites for ‘continuous

contestation of such public purpose and a receptacle for containing social anxieties' (ibid.: 177). He suggests failure is necessary to maintain this contested sense of legitimacy and serve 'the public's unresolved ambivalence' (ibid.: 192). This helps to explain how local authorities can be seen as occupying ambivalent positions, pulled in different directions – adopting modern management techniques to become more efficient, whilst simultaneously being distinct from the private sector and having an explicitly public role.

2.4 PRACTICE

This chapter has explored so far how ideas around negotiation and interaction are central in the interpretive turn in policy studies. It is not a straightforward case of a clear policy goal being delivered and implemented on the ground. Public policies are influenced and determined by actions at the level of government, the actions of the organisation responsible for delivering policy and the practitioners within those organisations (Friedman, 2006), as well as mediation from other institutions and actors (Hudson, 1989). This means we should not assume that 'practice', follows unproblematically from the policy statement (Hogdson and Irving, 2007). Given that one of the aspects of the policy process that this thesis is looking at is the negotiations around meaning that take place at a local level amongst policy actors, the idea of practice needs to be considered.

2.4.1 Defining practice

Practice is a hard concept to grasp (Wagenaar and Cook, 2003). It can be seen as 'a process by which we can experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful' (Wenger, 1998: 31). Practice is therefore more than simply doing work – it is 'the interactive context-bound character of our activities and accomplishments in the world' (ibid.: 143). Wagenaar and Cook (2003) outline that practice is part of a

community, and a larger network of relations, conventions and obligations. Freeman et al (2011) describe practice as particular configurations of action, norms and knowledge:

- actions – in the sense that practice involves people doing things
- norms - as these actions acquire the status of practice through being repeated –other practitioners recognise, understand and interpret them. However, actions are also improvised which is why it is hard to define practice
- knowledge – as sets of actions also involve and reproduce particular knowledge which comes from experience

The central proposition in recent literature on practice is that whilst the public experience a procedure or a routine set of activities, they are largely unaware of the work of construction behind the 'practice' and that those 'who are giving effect to policy are also shaping what it is' (Colebatch, 1998: 58). Griggs et al (2009) suggest an approach to practice that is about understanding what practitioners do, how they describe what they do and the interpretations and meanings that they give to policy. This acknowledges that practitioners have an active role in the formation of policy, by translating it into practice, and bring their own knowledge and experience to the policy process at a local level (Harrison, 2011). The task of analysts is to understand these relationships and the enactment of policy in the 'complex detail of local situations' (Wagenaar and Cook, 2003: 170).

Pritzlaff and Nullmeier (2011) suggest that a systematic research tradition centred on practice is still in its early stages, and Wagenaar and Cook also highlight the 'neglected questions surrounding the practice of policy' (2003: 170). There has been a gap between the theory of policy processes and the 'practical rationality of the practitioner' (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003: 19). Given the prominence in policy studies of the 'authorised choice' view, practice is often described in 'terms which are at

variance with practitioner accounts of their experience’ (Colebatch, 2007: 1). Within interpretive approaches, practice should be taken a unit of analysis, examining the knowledge and experience of practitioners and managers, and civil servants, politicians and professionals (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003). Freeman et al (2011) consider that given the amount of monitoring and measurement in policy making, it is odd that there is not more written about the policy work that public officials, professionals and practitioners are engaged with. They propose that paying attention to practice helps to rediscover a ‘thicker’ account of agency – in contrast to a rationalist perspective, this:

Foregrounds the social, meaningful and affective dimensions of practices, and the ways in which different identities, beliefs and values come to play a role in explanations of particular ways of doing things (ibid.: 131).

2.4.2 Learning and communities of practice

Despite the gaps identified above, there are several ideas around practice in the literature that are particularly pertinent to this thesis as they show ways of understanding some of the processes and behaviour within everyday workplace practices.

One of the dominant strands in theories of practice has been around ideas of learning – how practitioners acquire and develop their knowledge. Interpretive approaches centre on the idea that this is achieved through the interactions between people. Eraut (2008) outlines a cultural perspective on knowledge emphasising this social process. There is codified knowledge, in terms of the cultural practices of different professions; and individual, personal knowledge that people bring to situations, and influences learning in the workplace. Alongside this, there is knowledge that has not been codified. This is significant in working practices as it is ‘acquired informally

through participation in social activities; and much is often so 'taken for granted' that people are unaware of its influence on their behaviour' (ibid.: 42). It is helpful to understand learning as both social and individual, with meaning actively constructed rather than transferred between policy actors – 'living is a constant process of negotiation of meaning' (Wenger, 1998: 32).

The theory of 'communities of practice' has received considerable attention in the literature on social learning. The concept has been used in organisational and educational research to theorise how people come together to carry out everyday activities in the workplace. Lave and Wenger defined communities of practice as a system of relationships between people and activities that entail: sustained mutual engagement; a sense of common endeavour and joint enterprise; and a shared repertoire of language and routines (Lave and Wenger, 1991, cited in Barton and Tusting, 2005; Amin and Roberts, 2008). Learning is seen as taking place in groups, and trust develops through practice, and learning from each other in a collective and interactive way.

However, there are a number of limitations with the concept which can undermine its practical applicability. Amin and Roberts suggest that the term has become imprecise, and they propose that knowledge and learning in practice is 'situated, embodied, practiced, experimental and always provisional' (2008: 365), and cannot be neatly fitted into the idea of a community of practice. Handley et al (2006) argue that people participate in practice with other members without necessarily knowing why or being able to talk meaningfully about it. Roberts (2006) has also suggested that communities of practice might be more suited to organisations where workers have a considerable amount of autonomy, rather than in contemporary organisations where groups emerge quickly around specific tasks and can then dissolve again.

Lindkvist (2005, in Roberts 2006) has proposed the term 'collectivities of practice' recognising the temporary nature of project teams and groups in organisations and that these can involve a more distributed and abstract form of learning. This helps to highlight the role of 'individual knowledge, agency and goal-directed interaction' (Roberts, 2006: 633). This is useful given that working practices can often be remote and diffuse, and not based on being in a shared location.

Despite some of the limitations with the notion of 'communities of practice', Wenger's (2004) ideas around the production and distribution of knowledge in organisations provide a potentially useful framework for understanding the role of practitioners in exchanging and contributing knowledge in the workplace. He states that practitioners are best placed to manage their knowledge, and managers need to enable them to be to develop their practice. Wenger stresses that practitioners learn on the job – 'they invent new solutions, refine their skills and learn from their mistakes' (ibid.: 5). This has to be captured and fed upwards in the organisation, connecting strategy and performance. Practitioners then feel a commitment to the community of practice, and there is a 'combination of bottom up enthusiasm and top down encouragement' (ibid.: 6).

Eraut's study of learning amongst early career professionals is also a valuable way to consider the distinction between informal work processes (where learning is a by-product) and more formal learning processes. The former involved working alongside others, tackling challenging tasks, problem solving and working with clients, and the latter focussed on supervision, being coached, mentored or going on courses. Between the two there are also learning activities in workplaces that involve asking questions, listening and observing, reflecting, giving feedback and learning from mistakes (Eraut, 2008). The conclusions drawn are that support and feedback is crucial to create a positive learning culture, and that managers should develop a culture of mutual support. The presence of both these knowledge management

practices and learning processes will be considered when analysing the fieldwork data from the local authority case study.

2.4.3 Discretionary practices

There have been attempts made by authors to account for the strategies involved in practice – both conscious, and less observable. This is based on understanding that practices in the workplace can be ad hoc and unpredictable, and that traditions and routines interact with the ‘creative and innovative potential’ of practitioners (Pritzlaff and Nullmeier, 2011).

Freeman (2007) proposes that a clearer understanding of the practice of knowing is required. He uses the term ‘epistemological bricolage’ to appreciate that practitioners learn by doing, facing new issues and problems in their daily work. Drawing on his research with public health officials, he observed that instead of knowledge being disseminated outwards from a single source, policy makers piece together ideas - the bricoleur uses ‘a variety of sources, the opportunism and the degree of innovation’ (ibid.: 486). This ‘epistemological bricolage’ also involves other social influences and individual experiences of learning that individuals draw on such as past experience, comparison with other ideas, and elements that have been acquired and assembled, or kept until they are needed.

Discretionary techniques and ‘coping mechanisms’ amongst practitioners have received some attention in the interpretive studies literature, in an attempt to further an understanding of the skills and abilities of practitioners in complex situations. Hoggett suggests that public officials face ‘primary dilemmas’ that they have to negotiate a way through, as the nature of their work involves being linked to the ethical and emotional lives of citizens, and there are often conflicting notions of what they should be doing. For these officials, their work entails:

The exercise of judgement and the use of discretion in the application of policies to particular cases, or the implementation of policies where there are no precedents, or the operationalization of rule-governed systems in full knowledge that no system can ever provide guidance for every eventuality (2006: 179).

Returning to Lipsky's concept of the 'street level bureaucrat', Durose (2011) found his description of the processes of modifying, redefining and developing practices amongst frontline workers useful in emphasising the choice and judgements that practitioners make. In her own research on community engagement, Durose found examples of 'reaching', 'enabling' and 'fixing' amongst practitioners – the latter being when practitioners bring together government policies, organisational opportunities and community concerns 'in order to produce outcomes that satisfy these agendas' (ibid.: 989).

Alongside this, many practices in the workplace can be informal and instinctive, and other authors have focussed instead on the more taken for granted aspects of practices in workplace settings. Painter describes these processes as 'prosaic practice' – the mundane and everyday aspects of state processes that help to explain the gap between 'rule-bound model behaviour ascribed to bureaucratic actors and their actual practices' (2006: 770). The idea of 'practical judgment' is another attempt to explain the routines, explicit and tacit knowledge in practice. Hajer and Wagenaar describe this as something that comes naturally to people – it is 'immediate, intuitive, concrete, interactive, pragmatic, personal and action-orientated' (2003: 23). Wagenaar (2004) then applies this to understanding administrative work – the 'enactments of the hidden, taken-for-granted' routines' (2004: 644) – largely habitual and routine practices in the face of novelty and uncertainty. These are situated - there are informal rules that help to structure the situation, but also a large background of

beliefs, norms, narratives and values that are unarticulated but help to make sense of the situation. The 'practical judgments' guide activities and in this way administrators accomplish 'some kind of resolution that is both feasible and acceptable' (ibid.: 649).

These explorations into the strategies and tactics involved in practice, help to emphasise performance, negotiation and interaction involved in daily work that features alongside the rules and organisational norms. It is a useful way of explaining the tensions that professionals employed in public sector organisations are operating in, and emphasising that they are 'collaborative partners for innovation and improvisation within the policy process' (Freeman et al, 2011: 234). In the fieldwork for this thesis, interactions amongst practitioners will be observed, and the ideas from this section will be taken into account in order to help understand their negotiations around new policy.

2.5 TRANSLATION

There is a strand of work within interpretive policy analysis which explores the concept of 'translation' and its application to the policy process (eg: Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996; Clarke, 2005; Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007; Freeman, 2009). Firmly rejecting the linear view of policy implementation and transfer, the aim is to find a lens through which to look at policy that captures the uncertainty, movement and continuing nature of the process. This section outlines the development of the idea in relation to policy studies, and how it has been employed to understand the translations of meaning that take place in practice, and how translations of policy circulate and cascade down in policy making processes.

In his paper *What is Translation?* Freeman (2009) sets out what resources can be found in the idea of translation for policy makers and practitioners. Translation is usually

thought of in terms of a linguistic process between different languages, and Freeman suggests this is far from a straightforward process, with 'uncertainty and contingency, a matter of craft and compromise' (ibid.: 433), and subject to social and political pressures over what is chosen for translation. The focus on translation in language and literature can be applied to the translation of knowledge into policy and practice with three central messages: translation involves conscious change making these processes visible; these changes also involve conscious choices; and that translation is more than just interpretation – while interpretation implies understanding and receiving, translation suggests something more – 'the production of a new semantic object' (ibid.: 435). Translation entails representing something in a new way, and changing what it means (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2009). Freeman (2009) then explains how the 'sociology of translation' (which has looked at processes of scientific and technological change), also extends our understanding of translation by showing that communications and translations are multilateral; texts and objects are vehicles of translation; and that translation is a social construction.

In the context of policy studies, Freeman cautions that 'translation can be made to do too much work as well as too little' (ibid.: 439), yet maintains that the usefulness of the idea is in acknowledging the 'uncertainty, the centrality of practice and the recognition of complexity' in the policy process (ibid.: 440). Translation helps to illuminate the possibility of these unpredictable processes involved in policy making (Freeman et al, 2011), as there are multiple interpretations involving many different policy actors, and locations. There are constant processes of transformation, distortion and modification, with diverse stories, meanings and practices (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007). The application of translation to policy studies can help to explain the diversity and difference in policy outcomes. Clarke expresses the value of translation in moving away from 'implementation' particularly powerfully:

As policy moves between different levels, so it may be translated into new contexts, new meaning systems and new practices. Each level is never an empty space, awaiting the arrival of the new policy. It is always, already full of knowledge, orientations, habits and practices (2005: 11).

The focus on practice is a key idea for this thesis, and translation is a potentially compelling way to understand what takes place at this level, and to capture the work of practitioners. Meaning is constructed and reconstructed between workers: 'it (translation) takes place at the ground, as practitioners (including researchers and policy makers) talk and write about new ways of doing things' (Freeman, 2009: 440). In terms of the policy text, the idea of translation helps to explain how texts specify action at a distance, and the active role of 'new authors' who take up these texts (Freeman, 2008b). Texts are written and translated in different ways – 'it is the people, whether we see them as users as creators, who energise an idea anytime they translate it for their own or somebody else's use' (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996: 23).

Translation has also been considered as a way to explain where the ideas behind certain policy ideas come from and to understand the original setting of these ideas before they are 'simplified and codified' (Beebeejaun et al, 2012: 4). Applying translation to a new policy idea (the Big Society), they suggest that translation alerts us to how constructing new meanings is complex and unstable, with some meanings being lost in translation but also others being created through it. They see translation as a political choice, creating the opportunity for contestation, and leading to a possible lack of consensus. Beebeejaun et al stress that 'what is created through this constitutive and communicative process may not be what the (most powerful actors) intend' (ibid.: 6).

These developing ideas around applying translation to policy studies are appealing on many levels – translation is a metaphor that appears to capture the centrality of

language and communication in policy, the negotiations around meaning to find an interpretation that is acceptable in a particular context, and the movement of policy ideas across different sites and situations. The language of policy translation is one of displacement, hybridity, fluidity, enactment and social relations, instead of change, adaption, dissemination and institutions (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007). It allows for incompleteness, and 'misrepresentations, accidental associations and unforeseen outcomes' (Freeman, 2009: 442). The extent to which the theoretical and conceptual resources identified in translation are useful for understanding the policy process in the case study will be interrogated throughout this thesis.

2.6 A GAP IN THE FIELD?

One of the drivers for this thesis is that authors within the interpretive approach to policy studies have highlighted a gap in the literature around practice. As this chapter highlighted earlier, the key proposition being made by these authors is that 'we know surprisingly little about what bureaucrats and administrators do when they are doing their job, let alone about the ways they think and learn' (Freeman, 2006a: 377).

In response to this, there is a call for more empirically grounded work, starting with the close observation of the practice of policy - how policy happens and what policy means (Marston, 2004). Ethnographic accounts of policy practices involve researchers going below the surface of official accounts and creating a space for participants to explain the meanings of their work (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006), and being immersed in settings where policy work is being enacted.

Ethnographic accounts with 'thick' accounts of the policy process were hard to locate in the policy studies literature. Several notable examples were found where researchers had examined the differences in translation between national and local

levels and the role of practitioners in the enactment of policy. Pope, Robert, Bate, Le May and Gabbay studied the implementation of NHS treatment centres, and found the 'limitations of top down and policy-driven change... and the crucial importance of the front-line local 'micro systems'' (2006: 59). They examined the different meanings and definitions around treatment centres at different levels within a large and complex system, and the way these determined actions in the local environment. They concluded that the views in policy documents contrasted with the perceptions of frontline staff working in the NHS, and that the process of bringing in a new policy needed to be seen 'much more as a dynamic process in which meanings are framed and reframed at different levels' (ibid.: 78).

Coleman, Checkland, Harrison and Hiroeh (2010) looked at practice based commissioning in the NHS and also concluded that the implementation of policy is not 'a simple transmission of instructions from the political centre to the periphery' (2010: 289). They wanted to understand why practitioners in similar contexts ended up making different decisions and saw the role of policy actors and their frames of reference, alongside the local context that influenced what was enacted. They found that 'policy makers, meso-level implementers and ground-level implementers all frame the policy in different ways' (ibid.: 302) meaning at the ground level there was the opportunity to create something new.

Barnes, Newman & Sullivan examined the dialogues between residents and public officials in case studies around participation, and found that local organisations interpret policy 'in line with existing institutional frameworks assumptions, norms and rules' (2004: 270). Their research described how there was vagueness about the meaning of participation. In the spaces of confusion that this created, professional, political and organisation norms all influenced the way policy was translated.

Painter (2006) applied his idea of prosaic practice to examine the governance of anti social behaviour. This involved uncovering the partnerships and organisations in ASB policy that had become the 'agents of policy'. He found a 'diverse set of assemblages that effectuate (or sometimes fail to effectuate) particular kinds of state effects' (2006: 767). Painter calls for further research on these internal workings, 'to disclose the mundane, but frequently hidden, everyday world of state officials, bureaucratic procedures, meetings, committees, report writing, decision making procrastination and filing' (ibid.: 770).

These studies are valuable in terms of illustrating how national policy agendas are interpreted differently in local contexts and the factors that influence this, enabling the researcher to see the 'articulation between national and local representations and frameworks of meaning' (Jenkins, 2007: 34). It is only through being in the sites where practitioners are working that the iterative processes involved in articulating and doing policy can be examined. This thesis aims to further this work and respond to the call to try and understand what policy makers actually do more clearly, and how they account for their everyday activity (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006) – within the context of the interpretations around a policy journey from text to practice.

2.7 CONCLUSION

The central ideas that have been discussed in this chapter form the theoretical framework for the fieldwork, and are summarised here.

In terms of defining 'policy', there is an acceptance that there are differing understandings of the term, but the features that are important for this research are that 'policy' is a diverse phenomenon, with many different institutional forms and practices across a range of settings (Hodgson and Irving; 2007).

Griggs et al (2009) refer to the ‘messy reality of policy making’, and it is this characteristic that best reflects the understanding of policy in this thesis. These ideas challenge the idea that policy is a linear, sequential process. Table 2.1 shows a list of words that see the policy making process as being characterised by order. In contrast, the other column shows some of the descriptions used in the literature cited in this chapter that point to the disorderly processes around policy.

Table 2.1: Summary of the differences between policy as order and policy as disorder

Policy as order	Policy as disorder
Decisive	Dynamic and political (Kothari et al, 2009)
Statement of intent	Complex (Hodgwood and Gunn, 1984)
Coherent	No single, clear meaning (Colebatch, 1998)
Instrumental	Uncertain – ‘not a reliable guide to what is to be done’ (Jenkins, 2007 31)
Hierarchical	Rarely orderly - involves interaction and negotiation many actors, conflict, values and goals (Bochel and Duncan, 2007)
Implementation	Continuous ‘iteration and reiteration’ (Freeman, 2006: 373)
Delivery	Involves informality and discretion (Jenkins, 2007)

If we take the **policy text** as a statement of a decision (however incomplete), policy can be seen as ‘a practical framework to express political messages and achieving social goals’ (Hodgson and Irving, 2007). It mobilises particular values, principles and commitments (Budd et al, 2006) of political actors, which means policy researchers should consider the origins and purposes of the questions being asked (Hodgson and Irving, 2007). However, policy is more than the goals that are proclaimed in decisions, but is a ‘continual iterative process’ (Bochel and Duncan, 2007: 3). It is also about **practice** – policymakers and practitioners are obliged to develop solutions for issues that fall within their responsibility (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003), but rather than being instrumental actors in the process, they bring influences, interpretations and negotiations to their work. The **policy process** involves actors, networks and communities of people involved in bringing the policy idea into being. It consists of narratives and ideas that are mobilised around the policy and can lead to changes from the original statement of intent.

The idea of translation has captured one of the means by which policy can be interpreted highlighting the 'change, adaptation, mutation and transformation which takes place in all instances of communication' (Freeman, 2008b: 14). The potential usefulness of translation as a term is in encapsulating the range of ideas and approaches within the interpretive turn – for example, translation has featured as an idea in the discussion around policy texts, policy ideas, and practice in this chapter. The task of this research is to see the extent to which the claims made in the literature apply in practice. This will involve considering the ways in which policy is re-written and re-produced between people, and whether policy is always 'in use' in the local case study area.

The concept of translation can also be applied to the accounts that policy analysts produce – the analysis 'is a representation of a problem and our interpretation of it; it is a thing itself, a translation' (Freeman, 2008b: 16). In this sense, the work of analysis, and translation can never be finished.

The analysis in this thesis is therefore starting from three main understandings:

- There is a gap in terms of ethnographic research into what it is that practitioners and policy makers do when they are making sense of policy
- Policy making is a disorderly and messy process, and interpretive approaches that are sensitive to the social and cultural aspects and the ways that policy is constructed between people are useful when examining policy
- Translation is an idea in the literature that helps to explain that policy is a communicative process that is fundamentally incomplete.

In order to frame the analysis in this thesis, three aspects of policy will be explored in the analysis chapters of this thesis: **text, practices and process**. The aim is to illustrate three different ways to investigate **translation** at work during a policy journey – both between central and local government; and between practitioners in the case study area.

The work of Richard Freeman has been referred to repeatedly throughout this literature review, as his work on translation and view of interpretive policy analysis represents an exciting approach to policy. It is his reminder that ‘problems, policies and solutions remain uncertain’ (2008a: 2) that is particularly pertinent. A useful summary is that:

Interpretive policy analysis begins with observations – which are themselves representations – like these. It is informed by postpositivist social theory which attends to matters of representation through language, text and symbol in the constitution of social life. But it is also relentlessly empirical, concerned with what policy makers do, with ‘the work of policy’, in Hal Colebatch’s phrase.²

² From <http://www.richardfreeman.info/>

3

Methodology

Introduction

It has been argued that at the stage of planning and designing a research project, an interrogation of the epistemological, ontological and methodological underpinnings are important to situate the research and explain 'what might represent knowledge or evidence of the entities of social reality which I wish to investigate' (Mason, 1996). It is valid to recognise our philosophical commitments as researchers as these guide our work, informs the methods we chose and situates our studies (Cunliffe, 2003). This chapter explores the research strategy behind this thesis, the methods used and some of the issues encountered in my fieldwork journey.

In devising the methodology for this thesis, it was notable that there were not many comparable studies to draw on, reflecting the gap in the literature on policy practice that has been identified. Examples of researchers trying to understand what happens in the policy process at different levels in a local authority and between different partners in a local area were scarce – and no others were found from the youth policy perspective.

However, inspiration was taken from the methodological challenges of researching policy making in organisations - most notably: Duke's (2002) study of policy development through policy networks; Aldred's (2007) research into NHS changes; and Reeves' (2010) experiences with access and gatekeepers whilst researching in an offending unit. The theoretical approach outlined in the previous chapter 2 also

provided a useful framework to think about who is being studied (policy actors in the case study area); and what these actors are doing (their involvement with translating a new policy into practice).

The research for this thesis was based on four main methods

- **documentary analysis** of national policy documents and the local authority's plans, strategies and records of meetings
- **interviews** with staff at all levels within the local authority and stakeholders working in partnership with the local authority.
- **observing meetings** of those involved with providing services for young people. A fieldwork diary was also kept after each visit and interview.
- **a focus group** with young people in the local authority area.³

3.1 RESEARCH STRATEGY

3.1.1 Interpretive framework

The methodological approach for this thesis is firmly rooted in the traditions of qualitative research - a type of inquiry that cuts across disciplines, fields and subject matters (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). It is a situated research activity, aiming for rich descriptions that capture the points of view of individuals and how subjects make sense of their world. Buchanan et al (1988) suggest qualitative research involves the 'art of the possible', rigorous, but also allowing opportunities in the field to lead the researcher in different (and opportunistic) directions. In a similar vein, Mason (2007) calls for good qualitative research to energetically and creatively seek out a range of sources and to use them critically and reflexively. These propositions give the impression of active research which engages with the social world in a dynamic and

³ The planned focus groups did not go according to plan, and this will be discussed later in the chapter.

reflexive way (Seale, 1998), with the researcher being in the world of practice to get a sense of what is experienced there. This recognises the co-production of research between the researcher and participant, and that 'the personal biographical situation and local circumstances of researchers and their likely audiences are the main influences on how projects proceed' (Seale, 2004: 83).

The development of different research paradigms is well documented in the literature (eg Denzin, 1997; Bryman, 2004; Silverman, 2004; Fraser and Robinson, 2004). The positivist tradition aims for 'accurate' knowledge, and a true understanding of social facts (Ali, Campbell, Branley and James, 1998). The approach in this thesis eschews positivist theories that advocate the application of natural scientific methods to the studies of human interaction. A 'value neutral' approach overlooks the embodied and embedded nature of human agency, power relations and positions, and prevents a strong contextual understanding, close to the subjects of study. In addition, positivistic research methods are of limited use for researching policy (Rist, 1994; Duke, 2002; Yanow, 2009), as they do not offer the depth of understanding required to 'make sense of complex organisational and policy worlds' (Yanow, 2009: 187).

Critical perspectives have led to the development of new models of social research taking into account inequalities, categories of difference and the diversity of social experiences (Ali et al, 1998). Post-structuralist and post-modernist approaches understand knowledge as contingent, located in the communication between people (Fraser and Robinson, 2004), and therefore subject to continuous revision and reinvention. There is no essential 'truth' to be discovered by research, instead there are multiple readings and multiple interpretations from multiple perspectives, from research participants themselves, and social researchers. Qualitative researchers occupying a post-positivist position have made clear the 'inherent instability of knowledge' (Cunliffe, 2003: 984).

As Chapter 2 explained, authors in the interpretive policy studies field are broadly located post-positivist traditions. The position of my research within the various qualitative research paradigms can be summarised as:

- empirical – involving the systematic investigation of experience (Fraser and Robinson, 2004)
- epistemologically located in an interpretivist tradition where the aim is to understand meanings that individuals and groups give to their actions and institutions, grasping the subjective meaning of social action (Bryman, 2004)
- ontologically drawing on a social constructionist approach – seeing social phenomenon as being in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction rather than as external facts that are beyond the reach or influence of social actors (Denzin, 1997; Bryman 2004).

As this research is examining what happens between different actors around a particular policy process, it was particularly important to find ways to consider the interpretive practices around *Aiming High*, and allow for the multiple perspectives of participants in the policy partnerships to come to the fore.

3.1.2 Case study approach

The original research proposal suggested that the research should be a case study to allow for a depth of investigation to see the negotiations around policy. Despite this being clearly established from the outset, it was important to understand the possibilities and constraints of using a case study as the basis for the research and in particular, defining the field within the chosen area.

The case study approach aims for 'an accurate but limited understanding' (Stake, 1995: 134). The case study is a choice of *what* is to be studied and involves a commitment to understanding the complexities of that particular case (Bryman, 2004; Stake, 2008). Stake (1995) describes cases as *intrinsic* (the case itself is of interest) and *instrumental* (the case facilitates our understanding of something else). For the purposes of this research, the case is both intrinsic and instrumental – examining the activity of policy actors within the local authority area is valuable in itself, showing the complex processes of reaching shared understandings. This in turn helps to explain the wider processes of the translation of policy from national level to local.

The strengths of case study research include: context dependent knowledge – which can help in the development of a field or discipline; understanding complex relationships between different people and the processes involved in these; an attention to the 'noise' of real life; and the exploration of the unexpected and unusual (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2001). Stake has also stressed the close fit between case study research and a constructionist approach – 'the emphasis is on... 'thick description', the interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the case' (1995: 102). The case study approach seemed ideally suited to understanding the 'lived reality' of practitioners, policy makers and stakeholders in a local authority.

Thomas (2010) has suggested that case study research is often seen as having a 'second best' about it, mainly due to the criticisms that it provides a poor basis for generalisation. Flyvbjerg (2004, cited in Silverman, 2006: 304) has set out how debates about representativeness in case study research have been characterised by basic misunderstandings – namely that the further away you move from a specific case, the more valid the knowledge, and that case studies are used to confirm preconceived notions of researchers. However, these can be issues in all research – not just the case study approach. Thomas argues that case studies require a special effort, looking at what is possible. The aim is to record and present 'the nitty gritty of

everyday life' (Willis and Trondman, 2000: 11). Defendants of the case study approach maintain that researchers are aware of the provisionality in the knowledge produced, yet if the focus is on what the case does rather than what it is, then we should not be too apologetic about its external validity (Bryman, 1988).

Stake (1995) has also described a case as a 'bounded system', within which there is patterned activity, coherence and sequence. Given the importance of partnership working in the field of local policy delivery, the 'case' in this research extends beyond the boundaries of the local authority organisation as the interactions and practice are not located in one site. A local authority is not a discrete institution, but many different social spaces where practitioners interact, and are involved in the processes of implementing policy. Therefore, it may be more appropriate to view the case as this particular policy (*Aiming High for Young People*) in one particular geographical area. It is important to recognise that this is a boundary that I have imposed as a researcher, which involves choices and distortions that might exclude some subjects from this research.

3.1.3 Choosing a case study location

A case study inevitably involves a degree of arbitrary selection (Silverman, 2004: 127). Stake (2008) has suggested that choosing a case study should be done on a balance of typicality, considerations of access and the opportunity presented to learn from the case.

In conjunction with the National Youth Agency, I established a list of the main considerations in choosing a case study location, and an initial shortlist was drawn up:

- a local authority which had NI 110 (a national indicator to measure young people's participation in positive activities) in its Local Area Agreement (LAA) – so there was a commitment to delivering *Aiming High* within a specified timeframe
- a local authority which has been identified for extra government funding and support so there would be sufficient activity around the implementation of *Aiming High*
- the findings should be able to be shared across a reasonable cohort, with a local authority that is in a two tier location, or a unitary that is in the centre of a shire district (this was the NYA's suggestion)
- a middle to high ranking Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) score – another NYA suggestion - as it was felt that a good CPA score would indicate that there was a degree of stability in the local authority in terms of its organisation⁴
- I added the need for the case study location to be near London (where I live) so that access for frequent meetings would not involve unreasonable costs or time

Buchanan et al (1988) propose an opportunistic approach to fieldwork, and others have also suggested that using existing contacts can be fruitful for negotiating access (Bryman, 1988). Using contacts I had through my previous employment at the Local Government Association, I emailed councillors in five different local authorities asking for the details of the Heads of Youth Services so I could make contact, but also if they would recommend my research to the Department at the same time. This proved a productive 'way in', and during the course of May 2009, three introductory interviews were conducted with three different local authorities.

⁴ The Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) reported on how well a council was performing overall compared to other councils in England. It was phased out in 2009 and replaced with a Comprehensive Area Assessment.

These interviews were an opportunity to explain the purpose of the research and outline the requirements on both sides. I was aiming to spend up to a year in a local authority tracking the processes around the delivery of positive activities, which was potentially a time consuming request for the local authority. Following the three interviews, all three local authorities were interested in taking part. I decided that Redtown was the most suitable for the case study location, as I was confident that there was plenty of activity around the theme of positive activities and related meetings to this within the local authority to provide suitable data for the research activity.⁵

3.1.4 Ethnography

Once the case study approach had been decided upon, the next key decision was about the methodological approach in the case study location that would allow for the interpretation of translation processes around policy. Lendvai and Stubbs (2007) propose that in order to capture the worlds of practitioners, ethnographic methods are most appropriate where a sensitivity to the construction of meaning amongst and between actors is possible.

A precise definition of ethnography is now increasingly hard. 'Traditional' ethnography has been 'blended, stretched and combined' (Czarniawska, 2008: 17) and is characterised by the use of multiple methods, and revealing perspectives that go beyond a dominant discourse (Tsolidis, 2008). However, Atkinson and Hammersley (1998) and Basanzger and Dodier (1997) outline some of the features of ethnography which resonate with the approach being adopted here:

- the need for an empirical approach that is close to practice

⁵ 'Redtown' is a fictional name to disguise the location of the case study

- a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them
- a tendency to work primarily with unstructured data that has not been coded at the point of collection in terms of a closed set of analytical categories
- investigation of a small number of cases in detail
- analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human action

Furthermore, there are several terms that have been applied to ethnographic research that are relevant to this thesis, given the interest in how meanings are produced, and the context of a decision making policy environment. *Interpretive ethnography* (Denzin, 1997) focuses on how the ethnographer discovers multiple truths that operate in the social world. *Applied ethnography* refers to research that aims to ‘address and contribute directly to the solution of practical problems’ (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998: 120) and provide information about ‘the possible consequences of policy options of programs of directed change’ (Chambers, 2000: 851). There is also a tradition of *organisational ethnography* (Yanow, 2009) which looks at processes, informal relations, identity, change, institutions and networks in organisations which has also helped to shape the approach in this thesis. The overall approach is perhaps best summarised by Monahan and Fisher’s description of the goal of ethnography – ‘to interpret and make meaning out of the relationships among groups being studied’ (2010: 369).

A further consideration in developing the research strategy in this thesis was the relationship between theory and research practice. Grounded theory is a particular logic for ethnographic research which involves the ‘intermeshing of data collection and analysis’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 224). In contrast to an approach that starts with a theory then looks for examples, grounded theory is based on entering the

research field with a frame of reference, and then creating new concepts and ideas from the data, which are worked during the course of the research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), based on observations in social settings (Seale, 1998). This promotes an open ended style, with new forms of enquiry emerging in the research process (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Bell and Bryman, 2007).

This approach suited my research for a number of reasons: the processes of data collection and analysis inform each other, and researchers tend to enter the field early with guidelines to focus the collection, but it allows for leads and directions that may not have been anticipated. I felt it was important not to have a prior hypotheses given the active nature of the policy and political context for the case study. Therefore, a grounded theory approach would allow for some flexibility in approach, taking into account past interactions, emerging ideas, and unfolding policy debates (Charmaz, 2008).

3.1.5 Analysing the data

The final consideration in the research strategy and agenda was thinking about the analytical approach to the data collected in the local authority area. In her research into the implementation of a new health policy in a local area, Aldred (2007) described her methodology as a combination of ethnography and critical discourse analysis, in order to triangulate the data collected and anticipate the different representations of the policy from competing sources. The methodology developed here is similar – ethnography with a narrative discursive approach to analysis.

Narrative analysis involves a focus on particular sequences of language in the stories told by research participants, and thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008). The relevance of narrative analysis for this research is that narratives are produced *in situ* as the product of the talk between participants (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997); and groups,

organisations and government are all involved in the construction of narratives (Riessman, 2008). In discourse analysis, the focus is on the production of meaning through talk and texts, and critical discourse analysts also pay attention to the ways language is involved in social relations of power, domination and ideology (eg Fairclough, 2001; Taylor, 2001; Fairclough and Wodak, 2004).

For the purposes of this research, a narrative-discursive approach involved:

- analysis of the language, meaning, authors and audiences in documents in the case study (using Clarke (2005) and Newman (2007)'s cultural framework for analysis which will be explained in the next chapter)
- analysis of the interviews and meetings ordered around key research themes, locating these in their wider context, and drawing out narratives and discourses that respondents used to understand their interpretations of policy

The aim of this approach was to be able to show the processes of policy translation - how those involved made sense of the new policy, and what shaped their understandings.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODS

There have been recent calls for approaches that recognise methodological innovation in light of the fact that 'social data is now so routinely gathered and disseminated' (Savage and Burrows, 2007: 886). The research methods in this thesis were deliberately mixed - with interviews, documentary analysis, observations and (planned) focus groups used to collect data. Much has been written about triangulation (eg Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Strach and Everett, 2008) to 'illuminate or nullify some extraneous influences' (Stake, 1995: 114). However, my approach was

closer to Mason's descriptions of mixed methods – 'to ask questions about connecting parts, segments or layers of a social whole' (Mason, 2006). Studies are designed with multiple components, recognising that different kinds of data perform different tasks and play a role in the overall study. This is different from triangulation which Mason sees as 'rather a limp and catch-all justification for the use of more than one method in a study' (Mason, 2006: 8).

3.2.1 Access

There were two distinct stages to the fieldwork in Redtown. Access was agreed with the Head of Youth Services initially in May 2009. Between September 2009 and February 2010 the aim was to get to know the landscape of actors and sites in the case study area through informal conversations and observing meetings in the local authority. From February 2010 to August 2010 formal interviews were set up with individuals working in the local authority, voluntary sector and private sector involved in delivering positive activities for young people. Observations of meetings also continued during this period.

Whilst this was a labour intensive process, it did mean that I spent a lot of time thinking about the boundary and population of my research in terms of who I would ask to take part in my enquiry (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Woodhouse, 1998). I would not be able to attend all meetings, and I would not be able to talk to all practitioners and managers working around positive activities in Redtown. The choices made were inevitably driven by pragmatics, and what can be done in particular settings. With the help of the Head of Youth Services, and through attending meetings, I was able to identify the relevant figures within the Youth Services department at the city council who were directly involved in implementing *Aiming High*. I initially identified voluntary sector organisations and private providers via web research and subsequently through partnership meetings held at

the city council. Everyone I spoke to informally was asked '*who else do you think it would be useful for me to talk to?*' so other participants were found through this snowballing process. Through this access, staff within the local authority became accustomed to me being around and attending meetings. Reeves (2010) has pointed out that establishing the cooperation of people in research is a complex activity, requiring careful negotiation and renegotiation, and some of the issues with the manner in which I gained access, and then continued to be present in the local authority will be discussed later.

3.2.2 Ethics

In the early stages of the thesis, ethical clearance was sought and granted through the Open University Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee. Silverman (2006) has set out four basic ethical safeguards – ensuring people participate voluntarily; making people's comments and behaviour confidential; protecting people from harm and ensuring mutual trust. These principles guided my ethical approach throughout the research, along with the notion of 'epistemic responsibility' – where good work relationships combine with a strong engagement with social, institutional and political contexts to help avoid potential problems (Kelly and Ali, 2004).

I produced an information sheet for all participants and clearly explained the purposes of my research when I was setting up interviews, and before each interview (See Appendix 2). All interviewees signed a consent form confirming that their participation was voluntary; that the interview would be recorded; that confidentiality would be protected and that the information provided would be used for educational and research purposes, including publication. Participants were also informed that they did not have to answer any questions if they did not wish to, and if they wanted to end the interview, this would be respected. If any participant

wanted to retrospectively withdraw consent for use of their interview data then the recording and transcript would be destroyed. These concerns were never raised during the course of the research, but I felt it was important to stress that it was an option for participants.

I also produced a confidentiality agreement that had been agreed with the Head of Youth Services which was shared with participants prior to each interview. This stressed that the success of my research was based on the co-operation of managers, staff and young people in Redtown and I recognised the need to safeguard their interests. The agreement covered anonymity in the research by changing names and geographical locations. I also stressed that where I had privileged access to documents within the organisation that these would not be shared, and that I would not feedback or relay any information obtained through conversations and interviews with individual members of staff.

One issue of concern was the potential for internal political factions (Bryman, 1988) to impact on the research process, especially if the researcher ends up being a source of information for different groups. I felt that the biggest ethical risk in the research related to institutional and professional relationships between the local authority partners, and between staff members within the local authority. Interview participants were frank in many of their responses, and I had to be discrete and careful not to expose anything revealed to me in other interviews. Reeves (2010) experienced this in her research when managers asked for information about clients in the organisation. She refused and maintained her ethical stand. I was often asked to comment on what I thought about other meetings that I had observed, and always politely and firmly declined to give an opinion.

Ethical concerns in research practice are far from unproblematic. It has been suggested that ethical codes do not allow for 'the emotional, biographical and

shifting character of fieldwork' (Calvey, 2008: 912). There is also some debate as to whether organisations should be protected from harm in the same way as individuals (Bell and Bryman, 2007). Arguments have been made in favour of ethical guidelines that appreciate the power relations that structure research relationships and dynamic in organisations and the fact that interviewees are speaking in a capacity as a representative of a wider body (Aldred, 2008).

These issues had a bearing on the biggest dilemma I faced: having committed to protect names of people and organisations, I felt bound to follow through with this. As Guenther has found, 'the decision to name or not to name is rife with overlapping ethical, political, methodological and personal dilemmas' (2009: 412). However, I was very conscious that concealing names and places would not necessarily ensure complete confidentiality, as within the youth policy field, the location of my research might be all too apparent to some. Removing names also risks 'decontextualising findings by disengaging them from the unique places where they emerged' (ibid.: 418). The solutions are far from satisfactory in this respect, and felt clumsy in the writing up process. I chose to use job titles for the interview responses, as these are common across all local authorities, but this takes away the context of gender, age, ethnicity and location (Clark, 2006). A made up name ('Redtown') was used for the case study location, and all documents from the local authority have not been directly referenced.

On the one hand, the promise of confidentiality allowed individuals to speak candidly in the interviews, and undoubtedly helped to secure a level of access that might not have been possible without it. On the other hand, the anonymity of the written up research means the particular organisation and area is protected from further scrutiny in the future, and that any good practice guidelines that could be useful for other local authority areas risk becoming less useful if the site of the original research is concealed. As Clark suggests, 'anonymisation is an ongoing

process of negotiation, reflection and experimentation' (2006: 18), and far from perfect.

3.2.3 Documentary analysis

Yanow (2006) and Silverman (2006) have drawn attention to the importance of not just focussing on interviews when doing ethnography in organisations as this overlooks all the documents and secondary data produced alongside and around the research topic. As Chapter 2 explained, some authors have cautioned against taking policy documents as 'given' (Atkinson and Coffey, 1997; Freeman and Maybin, 2011), and stressed the importance of analysing them in a similar way to other informants in the research process. Understanding the construction and social organisation of policy documents, how they depict 'reality', and looking beyond the document that has been produced is very much at the heart of this research, and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Freeman and Maybin stress that policy documents are 'a point of entry and orientation for investigation' (2011: 165) in policy analysis. The early stages of this research involved analysing national strategies and local policy plans. Given the focus on *Aiming High* in the original research proposal, this was taken as the key youth policy document for analysis. Other policy documents that preceded *Aiming High* and had an impact on local authority youth services were also chosen to help understand the development of key themes in *Aiming High* and what had led to that particular policy solution. Alongside this, a few other children and young people, and local government policy documents were consulted to contextualise the focus of the Labour Government at the time. The implementation plans, further updates and research that followed *Aiming High* were also included in the analysis. The rationale was to understand the policy journey that led to *Aiming High*, and continued after its publication.

A similar approach was adopted in relation to local policy documents from the case study local authority – looking at plans and reports from the time of *Aiming High*, alongside earlier and ongoing policy documents. These were accessed via the council's website and were supplemented with minutes from official meetings that are available in the public domain – for example, Cabinet or partnership meetings where particular youth strategies were being discussed. Stake (1995) has highlighted the role of organisational documents in acting as records of activity that the researcher is not able to observe directly. There were meetings that took place prior to the start of the fieldwork, and analysing records of these was also important in tracking the processes and deliberations that had taken place in the local authority over time.

3.2.4 Interviews

Interviews with Youth Services staff at all levels in the local authority and other stakeholders in the local area were the main method used in the fieldwork in Redtown. The aim was to explore individuals' interpretations and views of positive activities and understand their roles in the translation of policy.

Qualitative interviews are seen as a dynamic process (Bryman and Cassell, 2006), involving collaboration and co-construction between the researcher and the interviewee (eg Woodhouse, 1998; Knight and Saunders, 1999; Rapley, 2001; Roulston, 2010). The analysis of the interview is an account which 'offers up a window through which to view the various possible ways that the topic of the interview can be talked about' (Rapley, 2001: 304). The importance of remembering that the talk produced in interviews is the product of a specific interaction, at a specific moment, highly dependent on the local context has been taken on board throughout the analysis in this thesis.

In the fieldwork, a semi-structured approach to the interviews was adopted (eg Byrne, 2004). There was a planned order around the research themes, but also the possibility of unanticipated themes was taken into account in my interviews, particularly allowing personal stories to emerge. Questions were open ended – including why and how approaches, examples, and directly asking for respondents' views.

Interviewing is a skill that researchers have to master – principally, being able to quickly establish interpersonal links in the interview setting (Buchanan et al, 1988). Creating such an interview situation is not merely a case of offering reassurances about confidentiality, but ensuring that the interviewee is comfortable enough to openly discuss issues, and reflect on his/her experiences (Miller and Glassner, 1997). My interviews therefore started with 'easy questions' about their role in the organisation, personal career histories, and challenges for young people in general in Redtown. The biggest deviations were around examples of their work, but these stories were also important in helping to understand how participants represented their working practices.

In total, 39 interviews took place as part of the second stage of the fieldwork (see Appendix 3 for a list). I had already had 17 informal discussions with many key figures in the first stage of the fieldwork and 10 of these participants were then interviewed again. This required a lot of persistence at times, but I was as flexible as possible in terms of letting participants set the time, date and location of interviews, and the majority took place in their workplaces. The interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder (apart from one interviewee who did not want this to happen). I took notes in my research diary after each interview, particularly as on many occasions, interesting discussions happened when the voice recorder had been switched off. However, due to ethical considerations I used the notes from my

research diary to help enhance my understanding of the field, rather than directly referencing or drawing on it in the analysis.

Duke (2002) draws attention to the importance of interviewing junior level colleagues as they are involved more in the day to day details of policy, and provide different perspectives on how the organisation functions (Compton and Jones, 1988). There was a strong commitment to this in my research, particularly given the importance of seeing interpretations at different levels within the case study area. I always interviewed people individually, to ensure that participants felt able to talk openly about their experiences without fearing what their superiors might think (Blumer, 1988) – though there is also the risk that this encourages elaboration and exaggeration with no one there to contradict statements being made.

Certain tactics have been suggested in order to gather sensitive and contextual information – for example, probing, nodding one's head, looking positive, repeating questions, repeating replies and making neutral comments (Strach and Everett, 2008), and I think most of these were used at points during the fieldwork interviews. I developed my own strategies to put myself at ease such as always taking up the offer of a cup of tea at the beginning so I had time to get out my notebook, voice recorder and gather my thoughts. I have also discussed my familiarity with key people and the organisation by the second stage of the fieldwork and this was reflected in the interviews as they increasingly referred to shared knowledge from other meetings where we had both been present. Interviewees started using phrases like 'as you know', 'as you will have seen', which made the conversation flow easily.

There are some limits to interviews as a method. The most obvious concern is that the only data a researcher has is what is readily volunteered. Interviewers can control the topic to an extent through guiding talk, choosing what to follow up on and questioning (Rapley, 2001), but informants decide ultimately what to disclose

(Woodhouse, 1998). There can be underlying agendas, with interviewees choosing to portray themselves in favourable way. This was evident in the interviews with senior staff who talked a lot more about policy delivery and interpretation than those at a more junior level who were focussed more on their practice. There were awkward moments at times in my interviews, and unresponsiveness and not answering questions is a common experience for researchers (Roulston, 2010).

The main benefit for this research of conducting semi-structured interviews was being able to value the opinions, knowledge, and understandings of interviewees, allowing for a depth and complexity that surveys and questionnaires are unable to achieve (Byrne, 2004).

3.2.5 Observing meetings

Meetings were observed during the course of the fieldwork in the local authority case study. The aim here was to see some of the processes around policy making, the site of the interactions and the behaviour of those actors involved. Observing meetings also helps to understand organisational power – meetings can be sites where the dominant ideologies, values and norms of organisations are expressed, negotiated and contested (Idema and Wodak, 1999).

An approach to observing in the field is hard to define – Junker (1960, in Walsh, 2004) states that most ethnographic researchers take up a position in between that of 'participant as observer' and 'observer as participant'. Others have argued that all social research to an extent can be classified as participant observation as we are all part of the social world that we are studying (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998). The advantages of this approach are being immersed in a social setting. Rather than just focussing on what is being said, the behaviour of people can also be observed in context, without disrupting the flow of events in the organisation (Bryman, 2004).

However, participants can alter their behaviour if they are aware they are being observed.

In total 20 meetings were observed, and a further eight that were scheduled and then cancelled (see Appendix 4 for the full list). I was introduced in these meetings as a researcher and I made it clear that my role was to observe, rather than participate. One issue with not having permission to record the meetings meant that the analysis of the policy processes taking place was much harder. I made notes immediately afterwards covering the main points of the meeting, who attended, what was discussed and decided. These were complemented in some cases by official minutes and agendas. However, undoubtedly some of the nuances and finer detail in the meetings were lost.

On a practical level, I used the meetings as opportunities to get to know people in the moments before and after, or chatting over coffee breaks, and arranged interviews with key participants on many occasions through these contacts. Robinson (2008) has highlighted the value of these informal contacts in the research process for new directions and insights. In the second stage of the fieldwork, I decided to focus on one area of the city and started attending area meetings there where staff were brought together from a cluster of nearby youth centres. This enabled me to see meetings at all levels of the local authority around positive activities.

3.2.6 Data analysis

There is an increasing tendency in qualitative research to produce transcripts from interview data. The benefits are that the data can be preserved and open to further analysis (Hammersley, 2010). However, a certain amount of caution has also been urged in terms of not treating transcripts as infallible (Silverman, 2006). Decisions are made when transcribing about how much to include – for example, including non

word elements or not, and deciding how to represent pace, intonation, dialects, gestures and silences. Inevitably it is a selective process and this should be taken into account when interpreting the words. I transcribed half of my interviews myself, and employed a company to complete the rest. This was a purely pragmatic decision due to the length of time it was taking to produce the transcripts, and was not ideal. I am aware that 'crucial pauses and overlaps' (Silverman, 2006: 287) are missing. The transcripts were representations – the *talk* was transcribed, but no additional information.

The research generated over 500 pages of transcripts, notes from informal interviews, notes from meetings and the fieldwork diary. I decided to use *Atlas.ti* – a computer programme for analysing qualitative data. I was wary of this approach, so was clear that the aim was to help me organise, interact with and retrieve data and not to use the software as a substitute for analysis. Drawing on Miles and Huberman, 1994; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; and Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, my approach was as follows:

- a 'light touch' analysis to begin with - reading 10 interview transcripts and jotting down themes and interesting points, and recurring ideas.
- devising an initial list of codes – these were drawn from the research questions, interview guide, the light touch analysis from above and themes that participants used themselves in interviews. These 52 starting codes were used on all files to label and sort the data. The idea was to provide a way to interact with and think about the data (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996)
- Comments were added to the files throughout the coding process – in line with Miles and Huberman's (1994) warning that the field will never fit perfectly into a coded conceptual frame.
- The synthesised files were then used to produce descriptive and explanatory accounts of what had been happening in the case study.

The last step is crucial – moving from coding to interpretation, and identifying themes, concepts and possible theories. Whilst it has been suggested that *Atlas.ti* has been developed as software firmly in the hermeneutic tradition with an emphasis on interpretation (Clarke, Marashi and Harrison, 2001), there are still risks involved in moving the researcher away from the primary data. However, I felt I had no choice given the volume of material produced, but was careful throughout to refer back to original transcripts and notes when making sense of the findings.

3.2.7 Focus groups

The research design included plans for focus groups with young people in Redtown. Given that *Aiming High* has a strong commitment to involving young people in decision making processes, and feeding in young people's voices into policy initiatives, this was seen as a key element of the research strategy. Some of the beneficial features of focus groups are that they are interactive, exploring 'the formation and negotiation of accounts within a group context, how people define, discuss and contest issues through social interaction' (Tonkiss, 2004: 194). The data from focus groups are grounded in the voices and experiences of those taking part in them (Bagnoli and Clark, 2010).

There has also been considerable interest in researching young people's lives (Heath et al, 2009; Delgado, 2006) and empowering young people by giving them a voice and sharing a better understanding of their worlds. I planned the focus groups primarily around visual methods, as these have been used in many studies as a successful way in accessing and representing different levels of experience (Bagnoli, 2009) and allowing young people to choose what they want to depict (Heath et al, 2009).

There are big issues in terms of setting up focus groups and I encountered these in my research. Drawing on the advice from Heath et al (2009), about the advantages of groups that know each other and in a setting where young people are already meeting, I decided to ask youth workers I had met during the interview process if I could attend a youth work session and conduct a focus group with young people who were willing to take part. I had three commitments to do this from two local authority run centres and one voluntary centre. However, by the time it got to setting firm dates for this, the local authority was at the beginning of an organisational review and the voluntary sector project was fighting for funding. Quite simply, the moment was lost. Bloor et al (2001) warn of this risk when you are reliant on an intermediary to set up a group.

I was very conscious of wanting to include the voices of young people in this research. The opportunity arose to help facilitate a focus group through the NYA who had been commissioned by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) to find out what young people thought about the first three years of *Aiming High*. This involved a series of tasks to evaluate the success of the strategy using spectrum, measures, mapping exercises and collages. The focus group involved eight young people, recruited through the NYA's Young Researcher Network by staff in the research and policy team.

Four of the focus group participants were from Redtown, and as a result I draw on data from this focus group in my analysis later on in this thesis, particularly around their views on what youth provision was currently available in their local area, and issues with this, and what they felt about the Government's youth policy. As I was not in control of the agenda for the focus group, there were obvious limits to how useful it was in the context of my own research questions, and this should be taken into account in the analysis chapters. However, given the lack of success in securing focus groups in the case study area, the opportunity via the NYA did at least provide

some insight into young people's views on *Aiming High*. Overall, the absence of my own focus groups with young people was a weakness in the fieldwork, and it felt particularly uncomfortable given the strong commitment in *Aiming High* to the participation of young people in having a say over services in their area, and my interest in participatory research approaches with young people. The experience made me realise how much effort is required to ensure a focus group can be set up and actually happen and it is a cause for regret that mine did not take place.

3.3 RESEARCH ISSUES

There are a number of challenges that I encountered during the course of the fieldwork for this thesis. These relate to both practical considerations – access, funding, ethics; but also the dynamics of researching in organisations where issues of space, politics and power have an influence.

3.3.1 Researching in a policy making field

The relationship between academic research and policy making has been the subject of much debate, especially with the emphasis on evidence based policy (eg Boaz, 2003; Lauder et al, 2004; Wells, 2007). Researchers and policy makers both have an obvious interest in understanding social problems, and there are different opinions as to how far social scientists should adapt to the realities of the policy making environment. Silverman (1998) argues that researchers should not let their research be defined by how professionals interpret these social issues. If research starts from a social science perspective, then it offers practitioners, managers and policy makers a new perspective on their problems. However, he also proposes that researchers adopt a more pragmatic position in between that of partisan and scholar, which will enable social researchers to take part in public policy debates and by 'pursuing

rigorous, analytically based research guided by its own sensitivities, we can contribute most to society' (ibid.: 96).

These issues have methodological implications with researching in organisations and areas where policy is being put into practice. The reality of rapidly changing policy environments, political pressures and organisational challenges can make researching the processes of policy fraught with difficulty. As I've discussed earlier in this chapter, I adopted a certain amount of pragmatism and opportunism in my approach. Given that my research was taking place against the backdrop of large political changes at a national level. I was privileged to have been allowed access to the local authority for nearly a year.

3.3.2 Researching in organisations

An organisation is generally seen as a bounded institution (Blumer, 1988) and the researcher enters this unit and moves between different levels of the organisation during the fieldwork. However, as highlighted earlier in this chapter, a local authority is not a bounded organisation in terms of spatiality or its working relationships. Offices are rarely centrally located, and instead dispersed throughout different sites across the local authority area. People do not have to be co-present in order to interact in organisational space. In addition, the partnership approach to policy delivery means that individuals within the local authority work with other organisations, across boundaries. This fragmentation and dispersal across spaces was the backdrop to my fieldwork and required a certain amount of determination and ingenuity on my part to continue to be allowed access to these spaces. I travelled all across a city I didn't know at all in search of youth clubs and community centres, argued my way into city centre council offices where no one had given my name to reception and generally had to learn to be quite brazen about 'being there' in the organisation.

There were many instances where I had to learn not to worry about the awkwardness of sitting in meetings where I was not participating. This was often uncomfortable in small meeting rooms where there wasn't room to sit to one side and I had to sit around the table with participants. I reflected at one point in my fieldwork diary:

It is an odd thing to sit in on a meeting where everyone in the room knows what they are talking about and can contribute. I know what they're talking about, but can't say anything, I have to get used to that silence.

It was at the senior staff level that most of the organisational defensiveness was visible, especially if they were from other departments less familiar with my research. On one occasion, I was told by senior managers that I could not take part in the meeting as there was no room, only for the meeting to be moved to a larger room. I followed, and observed from the back, risking my chances. Apart from this time, I was never refused access, and was on friendly terms with many of the youth workers, who even gave me lifts between venues or back to the railway station after interviews. Reeves (2010) has highlighted the danger of over-identifying with staff and remaining an outsider – and I did manage this, but having a degree of familiarity with people in the local authority helped to reduce the awkwardness at times of observing their working practices.

Following on from this, the biggest concern for me throughout the fieldwork was how well was I really getting to know the case study area? Shadowing has been proposed as an approach to organisational ethnography (Czarniawska, 2008), but this was not the basis on which I had been granted access, and it would have been very difficult to execute well in the context of this research. Staff were overworked and unsure about the future of their jobs for a large part of the fieldwork period. I am therefore very aware that the meetings I observed and the conversations and

interviews I conducted are snapshots of the policy process at a particular time and place. There was also nervousness about sharing some information prior to it being in the public domain, despite my assurances through the agreed confidentiality agreement. This was an issue that I also reflected upon regularly in my fieldwork diary:

Do organisations want outsiders present? Do they want people to see the messy reality of meetings and things not working, people not sticking to agenda, losing their temper with each other...

I know I missed some key meetings because my name appeared to fall off the email list. There were other occasions where I travelled to Redtown for the meeting to have been cancelled by the time I got there. There were definite silences and absences in this respect, but one of the benefits of local authorities is that the majority of meetings have agendas and minutes that are in the public domain. I finished the fieldwork feeling that I had experienced most kinds of meetings around the delivery of positive activities, but maybe not always at the depth or with the continuity I would have liked.

3.3.3 Power

The decisions participants made about what to share with me and what to hide from me relate, at least in part, to the operation of power in organisational life. There are power imbalances that come into play in interview settings with elites (Duke, 2002; Aldred, 2008) and this usually favours the research subject rather than the researcher (Bell and Bryman, 2007). 'Elites' within organisations tend to be busy and have limited time (Kezar, 2003). Duke (2002) found that getting beyond the 'official line' was difficult.

This was a feature of my research – the higher up the organisation the interviewee was, the more the responses focussed on organisational discourses and references to overall strategies rather than personal experience. However, it has also been suggested that power in research relationships should be seen as ‘ambiguous, fluid, multi-directional dynamic which can flow unevenly across and between different positions’ (Neal and McLaughlin, 2009: 695). The researcher has the interpretive power over the data and makes the decisions about what happens to it.

In an organisational setting, the personal identity of a researcher can also have some impact on how participants respond. Although academic identity can be helpful as it is a relatively independent stance, there is the possibility that my gender and age highlighted a difference in power between my status as a PhD researcher and senior local authority and voluntary sector staff. Duke (2002) reflects on this issue in her research into policy networks which involved interviewing senior figures in organisations that were inevitably older and male. She found that her continued access to the research field was partly dependent on her ‘performance’ in interviews. In order to assert her authority, she clearly communicated the purpose of the research before the interview, produced a visible topic guide, and had a clipboard, tape recorder ready as ‘props’. Duke also tried to ensure that the interviews took place in less formal parts of the office (for example, around a table or on a sofa) so the position of the interviewer and interviewee was more neutral and equal. I drew on this advice in my own fieldwork to try and minimise the effects of power dynamics in the interviews.

3.3.4 Gatekeepers

Some of the issues discussed so far reflect the fact that the researcher in an organisation occupies a precarious position – as they are ‘allowed’ access by people who occupy powerful positions in the organisation, but who also have the ability to

exclude, and direct the research within their own networks (Walsh, 2004; Bell and Bryman, 2007) rather than allowing the researcher to lead this process. Access has to be continually renegotiated (Buchanan et al, 1988; Reeves, 2010).

The fieldwork journey started off in a fairly straightforward manner. I had a personal contact in Redtown – the Leader of the Council, who put me in touch with the Head of Youth Services. Having negotiated access through the Head of Youth Services, I had his support and was accepted readily into the organisation. However, in January, the Head of Youth Services went on long term sick leave, and did not end up returning to the local authority. This was potentially very worrying for me as I was midway through the fieldwork and reliant on his endorsement. Although I had a positive relationship with the Operations Manager within the Youth Services department, I had lost that overall back up from a more senior member of staff. An interim Head of Youth Services was appointed, who I did end up interviewing, but he had little reason to fully endorse the project as his predecessor had done. By this point, the Leader of the Council had also been replaced. The second half of my fieldwork would have been considerably easier (with less chasing and persistence required) if my original 'gatekeeper' had still been there.

Reeves (2010) has stressed that having access to via a senior member of staff is useful in that you have a certain amount of credibility amongst staff, but that you also need to approach gatekeepers at different levels as part of an ongoing process of negotiating access. This happened with my research, which was how the decision to focus on one area in the city came about – through the positive response from the area manager in that location who was happy for me to talk to all the youth workers in her team. These decisions in the field can feel uncomfortable as the researcher is not necessarily always in control, and very aware that gatekeepers could withdraw support at any time.

Reeves (2010) has argued that researchers often fail to tell the story of their exit from the field which can be a prolonged stage in the fieldwork. In a similar way in which external political events led to far reaching changes in the organisation funding me, they also impacted on the final months of my research, with the threat of a Youth Services review and redundancies looming large on the horizon. At this point, engagement was harder, and I decided that it was time to stop conducting interviews. I quickly lost contact with my key informants, and many have subsequently left the organisation. This has caused issues in terms of feeding back the results to participants, which will be discussed later in this thesis.

3.3.5 Influence of funding

Another issues to take into account is the influence of the funding arrangements for my PhD. The research is funded by the ESRC, and also supported by an organisation – the National Youth Agency – which, at the time the research started, was the main body for delivering elements of *Aiming High* and a key player in promoting the case of work with young people in England. The NYA had its own programme of research around preparing and supporting the sector in the delivery of positive activities as well as playing a key role in elements of the *Aiming High* Implementation Plan (DCSF, 2008b). It has been suggested that wherever there is a contractual and intellectual agreement with a funder, ‘it links the researcher and research inexorably with the values of that funder’ (Cheek, 2008: 62). One obvious risk was of the collaborating organisation influencing the direction of the research (O’Brien et al, 2008).

I was conscious throughout that there was an external relationship to be managed. In the first year of the research, I had regular meetings at the NYA, attended their Research Advisory Group (which gave me a good insight into current debates in the wider youth work field) and asked for advice and contacts. However, the individual

who had initiated the CASE studentship within the NYA left soon after my research started. She had been instrumental in making the project happen, and her replacement, whilst very helpful and supportive, did not have the same commitment to the research. I did not want to lose the good communication that had been established as this was helping with the smooth functioning of the project (Cheek, 2008), so had to renegotiate my involvement. This was incredibly beneficial as it opened up other opportunities for complementary research, such as the focus group described earlier in this chapter. However, in the second half of 2010, the National Youth Agency's staff were reduced from 43 to around 15, and the research co-ordinator left. In the latter stages of this PhD, my contact with the NYA was on an entirely different footing again – this time as a Research Associate on their books for contract research.

Although CASE studentships no longer exist, my experiences show that it is worth bearing in mind for research students in the future what happens when the organisation involved goes through dramatic change during the course of the research, and what implications this has for the research. In my case, having established positive working relationships, I was able to renegotiate these, but I was very aware that the initial interest in my research from the NYA had waned – entirely down to changing circumstances, and the large reductions in public spending following the General Election in May 2010.

3.3.6 Positionality

An awareness of the researcher's position in the field of research, and relationship towards the people being studied is crucial. The researcher is embedded in the same social world as the research. As a result researchers need to be aware of their perspective and how it may affect the research process (Duke, 2002; Kezar, 2003). The

key question according to Schwandt is 'how should I be towards the people I am studying?' (1998: 316).

As researchers we may bring preconceptions about the organisation from our experience elsewhere, for example, as a member of a professional community (Cooper, 2008). In the case of my research, I brought an identity from outside academia to the research. I am a Labour councillor in Hackney, and also worked for as a Labour adviser at the Local Government Association which brought me into contact with senior councillors across the country and ministers at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Local authorities are political organisations, and there is a dynamic between elected members and officers that run through all local authorities – something I was all too aware of from my experiences as a councillor. I was very conscious that my first contact with Redtown had been through the Leader of the Council. I did not want this to be common knowledge as I felt it could make some people feel as though they had to be involved with my research due to its political backing. I was very careful to present myself as a PhD researcher, funded by the National Youth Agency, and keep my life outside academia quiet.

Some have argued that self disclosure can be helpful (Kezar, 2003), and on occasions I did chose to reveal that I was more familiar with the world of local government than most people would assume for a PhD researcher. One of these was whilst interviewing the Cabinet member for young people which undoubtedly helped me to gain her trust in the interview. There are challenges for mature researchers who bring different professional identities and prior experiences to their work.

3.4 CONCLUSION

Many authors agree about the limits of understanding in the social research process (eg, Geertz, 1994) and recognise the interpretive process of writing and the complexities of dialogue and listening. The act of translation from what the researcher sees to what is written involves an intrusion which Bourdieu (1996) characterises as 'perilous' and Keith (1992) as an 'act of betrayal'. There is a double interpretation in the research process – the interpretations of the people being researched, and then the interpretive frame that the researcher places these in.

This thesis, therefore, can potentially be seen as just one interpretation among many – reflecting the concern that researchers have to be careful about the claims to knowledge being made in the research, and more open and honest about its contingency and partial truth (Back and Solomos, 1993). Without this reflexivity, we can give the impression of hygienic research (Duke, 2002) which also might not capture the 'false starts and faux pas' (Bryman, 1988: 9) in the research process.

I have tried to address some of these issues by presenting in detail my methodological journey and where the limitations are in the data. The chapters that follow in this thesis are based on these understandings about the status of my data. From a constructionist perspective, the research is seen as a social product, involving an interaction between the researcher and the researched (France, 2004) and that organisational meaning and the research account are constructed between research participants (Cunliffe, 2003).

The reliability, validity and credibility of qualitative research is often the main charge against the approach. Hammersley (1992, cited in Silverman, 2006: 281) has outlined three things that qualitative researchers should have in mind about their research reports: confidence in our knowledge, but not certainty of its truth; that reality is

independent of the claims that we make about it; and that we are representing reality as researchers not reproducing it. The hope is that the theoretical stance and approach set out in this methodology chapter provides clarity about both the limits and possibilities of the data being presented in this thesis.

4

Aiming High in context: governance and policy

Introduction

Policy has been described as ‘an organising principle not just a product or outcome’ (Hodgson and Irving, 2007: 19). The need to understand the way that policy shapes people’s lives has been stressed (Newman, 2004; Jenkins, 2007), and one approach proposed is to examine the links between policy and governance around specific sites of policy (Newman, 2004; Hodgson and Irving, 2007). This chapter starts by briefly outlining Newman and Clarke’s work on ‘governing the social’, and their framework for analysing the cultural formations around policy, as a way of situating the importance of providing a governance and policy context in my own research.

The policy that is at the centre of the case study inquiry – *Aiming High* – is introduced to understand what the principal policy goals were in the strategy. The chapter then considers the wider context of changes and initiatives under the Labour Government from 1997-2010 which had an impact on some of the themes and approaches in *Aiming High*. Labour’s governance changes are discussed – in particular the drive to improve policy making processes and reform local government. The political and policy priorities at the time of *Aiming High*’s publication are also explored, as there were distinctive social policy concerns that were predominant throughout Labour’s period in office, that are reflected in youth policy imperatives. This chapter then introduces the main research themes that emerged from the consideration of the governance and policy context around *Aiming High*, and guided the fieldwork inquiry. Finally, a brief overview of the case study location is provided.

4.1 UNDERSTANDING GOVERNANCE

Chapter 2 introduced the diffuse nature of contemporary governance, involving different sites, actors, and processes, and some of the issues with accountability and decision making around this. Another criticism is that governance has dispersed the 'tasks of knowing and governing through a myriad of micro-centres of knowledge and power' (Rose, 1999: 190) – and New Labour's policies have been interpreted as contributing to this effect (eg: Flint, 2002; Crawford, 2003).

Newman (2009) agrees that there has been a dispersal of power and politics onto different sites, but her work (along with Clarke) argues that the Foucauldian governmentality perspective encourages too much attention on this. Instead, they use the phrase 'governing the social' to capture a way of thinking about this 'complex apparatus of social management and regulation' (Clarke, 2005: 13). Governance literature tends to see 'the social' as a separate entity from the economy or the state and as a resource to be mobilised (Newman, 2007). Instead of this 'thin' conception, Newman proposes a 'thick' description that takes into account the lived experience of social actors, and sees the 'social' as:

An unstable formation in which contradictory trends and tendencies collide, characterised by deep social divisions and inequalities and a site of struggle, resistance and contestation (Newman, 2004: 12).

Newman (2004) argues that policy making needs to reengage with theories of governance, power and the state, to see the 'field of tensions' around specific sites of policy, rather than the story told in policy texts. Newman (2007) and Clarke (2005) maintain that their approach does not ignore the role of institutions and practices, and instead links wider issues of policy and implementation with specific cases of

policy making, joining up 'context and content'. They have developed a cultural framework that offers a line of enquiry to highlight the often contradictory work that is taking place in policy. The aim is to produce analyses that are 'attentive to the uneven, unstable and unfinished character of social constructions' (Clarke, 2005: 4). Their framework involves considering:

- *Context* – specific contexts make possible and animate particular meanings
Examining context means looking at the work in the text to situate a particular understanding.
- *Contradictions*- social and cultural formations are located in the context of different possibilities and projects and are characterized by contradictions that need to be managed. This involves looking at what work is being done to manage competing rationalities.
- *Constructions* – the work that happens to construct phenomena and social arrangements in ways that assert particular meanings.
- *Constitutions* – the work that happens to construct subject positions needs to be examined to see how identities are summoned, mobilised and erased, and how actors might be hailed or interpellated in new ways in the text.
- *Contestations* – constructions have to be maintained in the face of alternative suggestions. The text works to managed these contestations (real or imagined) offering alternative perspectives.
- *Coherence* – the strategies and tactics to resolve tensions between different projects.⁶

This approach is relevant for this thesis and provides a useful way to consider some of the central ideas around policy introduced in the Chapter 2 – in particular that policy involves work to construct particular ideas. It links closely to the idea of policy

⁶ This framework appears across several papers from Clarke and Newman and some of the 'c' categories vary between. The 2007 reference from Newman draws on an unpublished paper of the same title and the published book chapter omitted the framework. The further category of 'coherence' was added by Newman in a seminar presentation on Policy as Text at the Open University in December 2009.

as being disorderly – their analysis focuses attention on the sources of instability in governance, highlighting ‘the struggle for meaning as a form of work that politicians and those producing policy texts engage in as they attempt to legitimise modernising reforms, and that practitioners engage in as they interpret and enact policy’ (Newman, 2007: 12). The framework also emphasises the discursive work in policy – asking questions such as: ‘why is *this* particular form of governance viewed as legitimate in *this place at this time*’ (ibid.: 3).

Aspects of Newman and Clarke’s framework will be returned to in Chapter 5 when analysing the policy text in more detail. This chapter is a prelude to this, introducing the governance, policy and political context around this research. This will help to situate the way that particular preoccupations feature in *Aiming High*.

4.2 AIMING HIGH: GOVERNANCE CONTEXT

This section briefly outlines the key points in *Aiming High*, and then positions the policy in the distinctive governance context under Labour, where the focus was on Third Way politics, modernising the policy making process, and reforming local government, all had an impact on some of the policy proposals and mechanisms in *Aiming High*. There is also a specific context within Children’s Services that preceded *Aiming High* all of which helps to explain the focus on prevention and the changing workplace context for practitioners.

4.2.1 A brief overview of *Aiming High*

Aiming High for Young People was a 10 year strategy that set out a commitment from the Labour Government at the time to transform leisure time opportunities, activities and support services for young people. It was published in July 2007 and promised £679m of new investment between 2008-11. The aims were:

- By 2011, more young people will be taking part in year round positive activities, some with support from a key worker. Young people in every local authority will have received expert support to improve their ability to influence provision locally and will be at the heart of decision making
- By 2018, every constituency will have a new an improved place to go, funded by unclaimed assets. Services for young people will be fully integrated, and young people will be fully equipped to access the help they need. Young people will have direct influence over 25% of spending on their services
(*Aiming High*, 2007: 84)

The three main themes in the document were around *empowerment* – ensuring the greater involvement of young people in decision making and the design of services provided for them; *access* – to a wide range of positive activities and support services with local providers working together to overcome practical barriers young people might face; and *quality* – a strong accountability and performance management framework to make sure services are working on prevention and promoting personal development, backed up by a skilled and confident workforce.

Aiming High intended to improve what was on offer to young people in their leisure time, whilst giving them more influence over these services. It was also a strong challenge to improve the capacity and quality of these services for young people. Another key aim was to help rebalance the public narrative about young people, showing that they are valued members of society and that their achievements should be welcomed and celebrated. The strategy made 55 commitments to increase the participation of young people in positive activities which were explained more fully in the two implementation plans that followed the main *Aiming High* strategy (DCSF, 2008a; DCSF, 2008b).

4.2.2 Third Way politics

Labour's time in office has been characterised by many as 'a framework of thinking and policy-making that seeks to adapt social democracy to a world which has changed fundamentally over the past two or three decades' (Giddens, 1998: 26).

There has been much commentary on the philosophical underpinnings and precise details of Labour's Third Way, and the extent to which the Labour Government in 1997 represented continuity with the Thatcher years, and a break from a traditional Labour commitment to the state (eg: Hawes, 2000; Powell, 2000; Ellison and Pierson, 2003).

Despite the elusive nature of Third Way ideology, in broad terms it encapsulates steering between state and market solutions and emphasising 'individual responsibilities as well as social rights' (Ellison and Ellison, 2006: 337). This led to a conception of the welfare state that was active and preventive, stressing 'the centrality of work and the distribution of opportunities' (Powell, 2000: 43). Welfare was still universal, but increasingly conditional. The Third Way also involves a more fluid conception of the state - playing the role of enabler (Stoker, 2004; Barrett, 2006) but also partner, facilitator and contractor with much greater diversity in service provision between public, private and voluntary sectors (Fairclough, 2000; Ainley et al, 2002).

Ellison and Pierson (2003) have highlighted that there is a paradoxical character throughout New Labour's reforms - with public and private elements; decentralised and centralised governance and conditional and unconditional welfare policies. Pierre has argued that this meant 'profound changes in the process of governing and public service delivery' (2009: 592), with people redefined as customers of public services, and having the opportunity to have more of a say over what is provided.

Clarke and Newman (2007) have a less favourable view and suggest that Labour had a preference for private forms of organisation over public; and transformed the institutional forms of public service provision, not necessarily for the benefit of those accessing the services. Bochel and Duncan (2007) find a middle ground, proposing that for New Labour the overall aim was to improve the quality of public services, and this did not necessarily have to be coterminous with the public sector. Hence, the patterns of provision and involvement were more complex and varied than previously.

By the time *Aiming High* was published in 2007, under a new Prime Minister, strong themes of personalisation (rather than choice) in public services were present in government narratives (Griffiths, 2009). Gordon Brown claimed he was pursuing a 'third stage' of public service reform to 'help services users and professionals to drive up standards' (Mullholland, 2008). The dominant threads of this were that citizens should have a real say over their services (Cabinet Office, 2008a); a new professionalism in the workforce; and the targeting of those services that were still underperforming (Evans, 2009).

Despite differing opinions on New Labour's approach, there is some agreement that there was a firm focus on making public services more equitable and efficient, with more user involvement and choice (Ainley et al, 2002). These are important considerations for considering the context of *Aiming High*, as they are form a backdrop that is both implicit and explicit throughout the policy itself.

4.2.3 Modernising the policy making process

In the early years of the Labour Government, there was a strong belief that the state needed to improve its capacity to respond to new social policy challenges, and as a result there were a series of attempts to modernise and improve the policy making

process (Stoker 2004; Beresford, 2006; Bochel and Duncan, 2007). By achieving better ways of doing policy, the aim was that the policies themselves would be more effective and lead to improved outcomes and the 'changes that really matter' (Cabinet Office, 1999a). In 1999, the *Modernising Government* White Paper was published. This stated that:

This Government expects more of policy makers. More new ideas, more willingness to question inherited ways of doing things, better use of evidence and research in policy making and better focus on policies that will deliver long-term goals. (Cabinet Office, 1999a)

The White Paper also called for a more creative approach to policy making, with a clear steer to involve and consult with different tiers of government, the voluntary and private sector and outside experts to 'develop policies that are deliverable from the start' (ibid.).

Some of the issues that were identified were with fragmentation, slow processes of change and a lack of coherence between policy and delivery. To overcome this an idealised model of policy making was proposed in the Cabinet Office publication *Professional Policy making*. This set out nine features of policy making: forward looking; outward looking; innovative, flexible, and creative; evidence based; inclusive; joined up; review; evaluation; and learning lessons (Cabinet Office, 1999b). As Bullock et al describe, the Labour Government proposed an approach where: 'modern policy making needs to be soundly based, enduring and coherent' (2001: 15), leading to greater public confidence from this increased transparency.

4.2.4 Evidence based policy making

Evidence based policy making was a central feature in Labour's attempts to modernise the policy making process – the mantra was 'what matters is what works' (Powell, 2000). An evidence based approach to policy making involves reviewing existing research; commissioning new research; consulting with relevant experts; and considering a range of properly costed options (Cabinet Office, 1999b). Policy making is seen as a continuous learning process – with pilots to encourage and test ideas, and evaluation and feedback to assess success and failure (Cabinet Office, 1999a).

Boaz (2003) proposes that research can help in the design and delivery of public policy by assessing the impact of interventions, improving implementation and helping to identify future problems. However, there have also been criticisms of the evidence based approach under New Labour. Bochel and Duncan (2007) have suggested that it was one of the more problematic themes associated with Labour's modernisation of the policy making process, as there were loose interpretations of what constitutes 'evidence' and 'research'. Their concern is that policy makers using research are often not aware of the complexities and limitations of this 'evidence'. Glendinning and Powell (2002) also question how evidence is chosen, and what evidence is applicable in certain policy situations – which can result in selective uses to promote an idea of 'what works'. Political direction and control can obstruct the use of research evidence in certain situations.

Blumer et al suggest that the 'high pressured decision making in government mitigates against careful testing and evaluation' (2007: 102). Political decision making arenas often involve quick judgments which do not necessarily fit in with the timescales of academic researchers. Boaz (2003) highlights how evidence from research has to compete with other forms of knowledge that influence high level decision makers in the political process, and there is a need for 'better ongoing

interaction between researchers and research users, in long term partnerships, which span the entire research process' (2003: 235). In Chapter 5 there will be further analysis of the ways that evidence is deployed in *Aiming High* itself – but the changes outlined above establish the policy making context of the Labour period – policy was expected to be based on evidence from a wide range of sources.

4.2.5 Local Government Reform

Local government reform forms another backdrop for this research. In order to understand the processes of translating policy into practice in a local authority area, it is necessary to consider the structural and governance changes that have taken place at this level, and the wider arena that local government policy makers, practitioners and stakeholders are operating in.

It has been argued that the 1980s and 1990s were bad times for local authorities representing 'the confiscation of ...powers by the various arrogations of centralising government' (Keith, 2004: 186). The Labour Government had a new approach to local government – and modernisation 'sought to make politics work again at a local level' (Stoker, 2004: 48). Downe and Martin (2006) suggest that there was a considerable amount of incoherence in Labour's approach to local government, but they identify five aspirations that are consistently referred to:

- improvement of local public services
- more effective community leadership by local authorities
- more transparent decision making processes
- greater stakeholder involvement in local decisions
- increased public confidence in local government (Downe and Martin, 2006: 473).

The improvement agenda relates to Labour priorities on public service reform.

Initially, the Best Value regime was at the centre of this – a statutory duty for all local authorities to review their functions over a five year period to assess whether existing methods of delivering services were the best option available (Downe and Martin, 2006). This was then replaced with Comprehensive Performance Assessments that looked at the overall performance of local services and their capacity to improve. The message was that local authorities and other organisations had to align their priorities and tackle complex issues together.

Under Labour there were considerable efforts made to strengthen local political leadership so that elected leaders, managers and stakeholders are *jointly* involved in searching for solutions to policy issues (Daly and Davis, 2002). Local authorities were expected to show coherent leadership of their communities, and offer a vision for the area – ‘relating and shaping the actions of government and the public sector to the needs of the locality’ (Lyons, 2007). Later developments during Labour’s time in office such as Local Area Agreements (LAAs), Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and the reduction in performance indicators demonstrated a willingness to ‘let go’ from the centre and to trust local government to deliver.⁷

Arguments have also been made for ‘double devolution’ – from central to local; and then from local authorities to communities (Mulgan and Bury, 2006). This was articulated in drives to shift power from the centre and involve communities more meaningfully in local democracy (Rogers and Robinson, 2004; Civil Renewal Unit, 2005; DCLG, 2006; DCLG, 2008). The overriding principles are that decisions should be made at a neighbourhood level closer to the citizen, and the community should be involved at a local level in shaping local services.

⁷ LAAs set out the priorities for a local area – and were agreed between central government and local authorities and their key partners. LSPs are partnerships that bring together local authorities with private, business, community and voluntary sectors in a local area to provide a single point of co-ordination.

Stoker uses the term 'network community governance' to capture the move towards 'wider, looser organisations, joined through a complex mix of interdependencies' (2004: 24). This has resulted in 'a more complex and overlapping set of local institutions and actors' (ibid.: 4) which local government has to co-ordinate and steer processes through. Policy locally required the active consent of the public, and local authorities are more open and accountable to the populations they serve (Tichelar and Watts, 2000). There are multiple sources of legitimacy, with new partners, tools and ways of working for local authorities (Stoker, 2004).

However, Labour's local government reform has been criticised. At times, there were overlapping and competing drives, with initiatives from different parts of Whitehall contradicting each other (Downe and Martin, 2006). The Best Value Regime and CPA were felt to be too managerial and top down, undermining the ability of local government to respond to local needs (Lyons, 2007). In their work with local government officers, Downe and Martin (2006) found that a common complaint was that there were too many policies in quick succession. The volume of new initiatives often left local government struggling to catch up. Critics of Labour's local government reform have also argued that new localism was hampered by a lack of clarity over this central/local divide (Walker, 2007).

Aiming High was published at a point where these debates were still being played out. The context for understanding policy translation at a local level, therefore, is an expanded role for local government in partnership with other sectors, and an expectation that with more devolution of power, local authorities are best placed to make decisions for their local communities. However, the effectiveness of local authorities to implement policy locally and shape the future of their areas has to be considered against a backdrop of national priorities and national funding streams which influence the scope of local decision making. This caused particular tensions in

the implementation of *Aiming High* which will be explored further in the analysis chapters.

4.2.6 Children's Services and prevention

The origins of *Aiming High* can also be viewed against the backdrop of wider reforms to children's services under Labour. These have been described as 'a significant watershed in thinking' and a 'major period of reform and change' (Parton, 2006: 976). The Children's Act 2004 introduced a reorganisation of services for children and young people. The aim was to improve outcomes for all children and young people, under the banner of Every Child Matters: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well being. The five Every Child Matters outcomes are seen as universal for every child and young person, regardless of their background and circumstances, and focussed interventions on narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged and their peers.

There was a duty on local authorities to make arrangements to promote co-operation between agencies through establishing Children's Trusts (a Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership), and produce a single Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). The Act also made provision for regular Joint Area Reviews (JAR) to be carried out looking at how children's services as a whole operate in the local authority area.

The key message in these reforms was the need for early intervention and prevention with services co-ordinated more strategically at a local level. They appeared publicly to be in response to the Climbié tragedy.⁸ However, as Parton (2006) suggests, the need for a greater focus on prevention predated this considerably. Pugh and Parton (2003) also highlighted how the moves towards more 'joined up government' with

⁸ Victoria Climbié was an 8 year old girl who was abused, and died in 2000. Her death led to a public inquiry by Lord Laming which identified many failings in the services that she had come into contact with.

integrated services to more effectively meet the needs of children and young people had long been on the agenda. *Professional Policy Making* (Cabinet Office, 1999b) recognised that as well as a vertical 'joining up' between those implementing policy and service deliverers, a horizontal joining up between organisations and agencies was also required. In order to find solutions to 'wicked issues' agencies would need to work together, and share responsibility for tackling complex issues (Huxham and Vangen, 1996).

When *Aiming High* was published, there had been a period of activity and renewed emphasis on reforming children's services. In 2007, a government review identified failings of services to respond to the needs of children and families. There were criticisms of silo working, the lack of capacity in the workforce to deliver prevention and early intervention (HM Treasury/DfES, 2007: 22) and a lack of integration between services. *The Children's Plan* (DCSF, 2007) was published in the same year which set out the Government's aims to strengthen support for all families, and emphasises that its proposals were in response to the concerns of parents, teachers, professionals and children and young people themselves. *Aiming High* reflects these challenges, and the need to make sure services are integrated and able to fulfil a preventative role is emphasised, along with addressing the issues that remain 'around workforce quality, leadership and management of youth services' (2007: 70).

4.2.7 Changing professional practices

The policy shifts in Children's Services inevitably had an impact on the working practices of professionals. Alongside the focus on workforce capacity issues, children's services professionals were now expected to work across boundaries and with other practitioners from very different backgrounds.

In new governance spaces, workers have the potential to be more innovative (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003), and Labour wanted to see practitioners as entrepreneurs in the policy process (Durose, 2011). Durose has suggested that reforms often meant that the neighbourhood has re-emerged as a site of policy intervention, and 'reconstituted the space in which front-line workers operate' (2011: 991). However, the extent to which services locally could innovate and work collaboratively under the Every Child Matters agenda when partnerships had 'centrally directed strategies for services' (Milbourne et al, 2009: 278) has also been questioned. As we have already seen, there was a tension between localist solutions and the target driven approach of the Labour Government.

Moves to multi-agency working have been identified as a challenge, with 'destabilised traditional professional roles, identities and values' (Daniels et al, 2007: 532). Integrated services can mean navigating different settings, boundaries, structures and statutory priorities and these changes require time and attention to embed (Yates and Payne, 2007). It can also result in tensions where rival professions are labelled as 'faults, amateurs or incompetents', diverting blame for problems that arise (Hall, 2005: 189). In addition, Durose (2011) found in her research that everyday work for many practitioners now involves policy delivery and involving service users and the community in these processes. The changing professional identities of youth workers will be explored more fully later in this thesis, along with the ways that workers navigate this messy local governance context. However, it is important to introduce here the extent to which practitioners were positioned in new configurations of services and working practices and the tensions this could potentially cause with a new set of rules to negotiate.

4.3 SOCIAL POLICY CONTEXT

This chapter has discussed the changing governance context that *Aiming High* was located in, and these ideas will be returned to throughout the analysis chapters of this research to help understand the policy processes in the local authority case study. This next section looks more closely at youth policy and what preceded *Aiming High* to understand where it was situated in Labour's reforms, as well as the policy priorities and ideas that are interwoven in the strategy itself.

4.3.1 The policy journey to *Aiming High*

Local authority youth services are generally identified as dating back to 1939 when local education authorities were encouraged to set up youth committees and provide a service in cooperation with voluntary organisations (NYA, 2006a). In the post war period, the youth service was to cater for all young people, but with the emphasis on the less skilled (Evans, 1998). With the challenges of the recession in the 1980s and 1990s, there was pressure for the youth service to show its unique contribution to young people, and in particular helping to develop attributes needed for work (ibid.). Youth services are not statutory, but there is a requirement under the Education Acts of 1944 and 1992, for local authorities to secure a youth service (Davies, 1999).

Aiming High can be seen as a distinctly Labour youth policy, published in the third term of the Labour Government. Table 4.1 summarises some of the key policy documents that referred to youth services under the Labour Government.

Table 4.1: Labour's youth work policy announcements 1997-2007

Date	Policy document	Key proposals
2000	National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal – PAT 12 – Young People (SEU, 2000)	Need for more consistent coverage and provision for the Youth Service Services and departments have worked too much in isolation
2002	Transforming Youth Work – Resourcing Excellent Youth Services (DfES, 2002)	Set out a vision for a local authority youth service – understanding local circumstances and the impact on young people
2005	Youth Matters (DfES, 2005)	Aim to give young people more of say in the way local services and activities are provided.
March 2006	Youth Matters: next steps (DfES, 2006a)	Integrated youth support services in each local area bringing together improved information, advice and guidance; opportunities through positive activities; and targeted youth support
July 2006	Children and Young People Policy Review launched	Includes looking at a strategy for youth services
January 2007	Policy Review of Children and Young People Report published (HM Treasury/DfES, 2007)	Identified the need to reduce barriers to participation, raise standards and consistency, and involve young people in design and delivery of services
March 2007	Targeted Youth Support – a guide (DfES, 2007b)	Reformed targeted youth support central to Youth Matters
March 2008	Statutory guidance on positive activities published (DCSF, 2008h)	Sets out new duty on local authorities for all young people 13-19 to have access to positive activities

The initial focus from the Labour Government was on tackling youth unemployment and reforming the youth justice system (Williamson, 2005). These were two of the five pledges made in Labour's 1997 manifesto – to fast-track punishment for persistent young offenders, and get 250,000 under-25 years-olds off benefits and into work.⁹ This was reflected in documents at the time – for example, the Social Exclusion Unit's report *Bridging the Gap*, published in 1999, analysed education,

⁹ <http://www.labourarchive.com/539/>

training and employment opportunities for young people (Davies, 2008: 13). The policy focus was on establishing the Connexions service to bring together advice, guidance and support for all young people.¹⁰

The lack of a statutory basis for youth services has led some to describe youth work as having a 'chequered history... constantly starved of stable and secure funding' (Coles, 2000: 182). In Labour's first term, the speeches of the ministers with responsibility for youth services emphasised 'patchiness' in terms of the quality of local authority youth services (ibid.: 20). However, it has been suggested that under New Labour, there were attempts to coordinate youth policy more coherently (Coles, 2000). One of the legacies of the Social Exclusion reports was that there were new structures within central government to try and ensure coherence across different agencies and departments (ibid.). For example, the Children and Young People's Unit was set up in 2000 which also had a dedicated budget for young people's participation (Williamson, 2005).

A clearer interest in the work of local authority youth services emerged with the publication of *Transforming Youth Work* (DfES, 2002). This set out the Government's vision for 'modernised youth services' and was hailed in the ministerial introduction as a 'landmark document'. There was optimism that youth work could make 'a proper and professional difference on a range of policy objectives concerning young people' (Williamson 2005: 18).

The *Youth Matters* Green Paper (DfES, 2005) followed which established the need for a local youth offer (subsequently called 'integrated youth support') based around:

- 'things to do and places to go' – positive activities and facilities for young people commissioned by local authorities

¹⁰ The Connexions Service was launched on a phased basis in April 2001 through a network of partnerships. The target was to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training by 10% between November 2002-November 2004.

- **clear information, advice and guidance** – with responsibility for commissioning this devolved to local authorities instead of the Connexions Service
- **the active involvement of young people** through playing a greater role in their communities and volunteering
- **targeted youth support** – more tailored and intensive support for those who are most at risk of poor outcomes

There was a strong theme in *Youth Matters* of giving young people more of a say in the way local services and activities are provided through the Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund.¹¹ A statutory duty was introduced in the Education and Inspections Act 2006, for all local authorities to secure and publicise positive activities for young people. In *Youth Matters: Next Steps* the ministerial forward described this as a 'radical reform of services for young people' (DfES, 2006a).

Over a period of four years, there had been two major documents on the role of youth services, heralded and presented as major reforms to improve services for young people. Yet within months of the publication of *Youth Matters*, the Minister of State for Young People, Beverley Hughes MP, was already talking about the next vision – 'a ten year strategy for young people and their services' (Hughes, 2006a). In the 2006 Budget, there was an announcement that the Comprehensive Spending Review for 2007-2011 would be informed by a series of policy reviews, one of which was around children and young people policy. Ministers still viewed youth services as being inconsistent: the review was launched with the statement from the then Secretary of State that: 'despite significant progress since *Youth Matters* services for young people are too often fragmented, patchy and poor' (Balls, 2006). The Terms of Reference (HM Treasury, 2006) included a strand on a strategy for youth services

¹¹ These were funds that young people could apply for from their local authority for projects to improve local services. Panels of young people in each area decided where to spend the money. Funding ended for the YOF and YCF in 2011.

looking at positive activities, active citizenship opportunities, access to youth activities and the role of youth workers. Despite the attempts made in *Transforming Youth Work* and *Youth Matters*, the main challenges were still being identified as around access, engagement and quality and the need for a coherent local offer for young people by local authorities. This set the backdrop for the next government vision for services for young people in *Aiming High*.

The implementation of youth policy under Labour has also been discussed in the literature. Whilst the Government felt there was a lack of progress in achieving its vision for youth services, there were also challenges around translating youth policy goals into practice, and the local variations influenced by practitioners' interpretations – issues that will be discussed more fully in relation to *Aiming High* in the analysis chapters of this thesis. Labour's youth policy has been interpreted as lacking coherence at a local level. For example, in 2004, the Make Space campaign found that 47% of local authorities said they lacked strategic direction from government over youth services, and that this was creating 'contradictory policy and undermines the impact of the complex web of programmes and initiatives targeted at young people' (Make Space, 2004). There are also examples where clear youth policy objectives and strategies have failed to achieve their aims, most noticeably with Connexions where the central Government vision was disconnected from what was needed on the ground to implement the services (Yates and Payne, 2007).

Youth work practice can be seen as involving the interactions between youth workers and young people they work with; the social policy context and priorities; and theories of practice that guide the work of practitioners (Payne, 2009). Ord (2007) has referred to a gap between theory and practice in youth work, and one interpretation is that this is a 'site of struggle' against involvement from the state (Payne, 2009). Williamson has drawn attention to the 'unexpected deficiencies' that policy faces when it is being delivered by professionals and young people, which then require

further debate and refinement (2002: 122). Changing policies, new organisational structures and shifting views of young people, have meant a 'continuous stream of new issues and dilemmas' (Rixon, 2007: 15) for youth work practitioners - this context was the backdrop for many of the interviews in the case study area.

4.3.2 Policy priorities under Labour

Policy reflects the values and priorities of governments at the particular point of their production. As Clarke suggests: 'the ideological or discursive work of political projects is rarely 'pure' – programmes and policies are not simply the enactment of a simple and unified political position' (2005: 10). There are a set of values expressed in *Aiming High* around:

- **progressive universalism** - universal services, but with extra support for those who need it;
- **rights and responsibilities** - the Government expects young people to attend school and in return they should expect access to opportunities and support outside school;
- a particular understanding of **youth** as being a time of risk.

These principles help to justify the need for further youth services reform, yet they are not concerns that are unique to youth policy. These were themes that the Labour Government had prioritised repeatedly and influenced their policies during this period. In order to understand why the measures in *Aiming High* were being proposed and what shaped them, this section examines the context of these New Labour priorities in more detail. These were not the only priorities that Labour had – but the choices made in this section illustrate the themes that have most relevance for *Aiming High*. The way these ideas are mobilised and used in the policy text itself will be explored more closely in Chapter 6.

Although universal services for young people were at the heart of *Aiming High*, it stressed that 'efforts are focussed on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, and on intervening early to prevent problems escalating' (*Aiming High*, 2007: 15). The idea of 'progressive universalism' in *Aiming High* was influenced by a strong focus from the Labour Government around tackling social exclusion. The shift in emphasis has been to associate material poverty with other social and cultural problems (Levitas, 1998) encapsulating what can happen 'when people or areas face a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown' (SEU, 2004). Social problems are therefore seen as being entrenched in particular neighbourhoods (Ellison and Pierson, 2003), which lack 'the options, choices and resources that the remainder of the population assume to be normal' (Henderson, 2007: 131). This link is prominent in youth policy documents, with the assumption that certain types of neighbourhoods with high levels of deprivation will mean young people are less likely to achieve positive outcomes (Hughes, 2006b).

A more recent discussion paper from the Social Exclusion Task Force reinforced these early ideas about social exclusion by linking low aspirations and attainment amongst young people to places characterised by 'close knit social networks' and 'low population mobility' (Cabinet Office, 2008b), where there are strong local social networks but 'low bridging social capital' and 'low collective efficacy'. Holland (2009) has suggested that it is the stress on reciprocity, trust, co-operation, family and community in Putman's (2000) writings on social capital that have had most currency with policy makers. Although, social capital was not referenced specifically in *Aiming High* the message was that in poorer areas relationships between adults and young people could be improved in terms of working together to find solutions for common problems in their neighbourhoods (*Aiming High*, 2007: 41).

The area based approaches to tackling social exclusion reveals the influence of communitarianism on Labour policy discourses (eg Driver and Martell, 1998; Little, 2002). There is the assumption first, that 'community' can be identified as a target for policy (Imrie and Raco, 2003) and that social order and responsibility stems from a strong community (Johnstone, 2004; Amin, 2005). However, a community based on 'shared activities, shared public spaces and shared institutions' (Miliband, 2005), fails to recognise that 'community' is rarely rooted in a geographical locale, engendering the same set of attachments for all. *Aiming High* depicted community uncritically, assuming uniformity and shared concerns: young people and communities should 'come together to address common issues' (2007: 29) as communities are 'often uniquely placed to understand and respond to specific needs and challenges' (ibid.: 61).

Rights and Responsibilities

The New Labour emphasis on 'rights and responsibilities' was another key theme that was reflected in *Aiming High*. The new welfare contract under Labour suggested that individuals have to accept some liability for their circumstances and engaging with initiatives designed to improve opportunities (Macleavy, 2006). This was apparent in early New Labour policies directed towards young people. For example, the New Deal for Young People was mandatory for 18-24 year olds who had been claiming Job Seekers Allowance for six months or more. Other policies modernising secondary schools, vocational training, and reforming higher education have shown that the expectation is that young people show responsibility and acquire skills and qualifications to take part in the world of work (Mizen, 2003). Gordon Brown emphasised that there would be no change of emphasis under his leadership. His speech to Labour Party Conference in 2007 stressed that 'I believe we have not done

enough in the last ten years to emphasise that in return for the rights we all have, there are responsibilities we all owe' (Brown, 2007).

However, there was also a tension around rights and responsibilities with regards to young people. Another New Labour theme present in policies for young people was around encouraging active citizenship. This was included as a new subject on the school curriculum and it was expected that young people would participate more in democratic processes through initiatives such as the UK Youth Parliament. These approaches to citizenship have been criticised for overlooking the more active, dynamic processes in citizenship (France and Meredith, 2009). The emphasis is on teaching young people about their social and moral responsibility, rather than the lived experience of citizenship (ibid.). As a result, young people can lack support and opportunities to 'make a reality of their citizenship' (Hall and Williamson, 1999: 5), and ask questions and challenge their communities rather than fitting in with a form of citizenship decided by adults. Such and Walker (2005) have argued that the rights and responsibilities agenda is ill defined in relation to young people. More responsibility is demanded, yet the focus is more on what young people do *not* do, and what they are lacking (Lister, 2005), in conflict with other policy drives to increase the say and influence of people in local decision making. This tension is visible in *Aiming High* – the policy rests on the assumption that young people *should* be participating in positive activities – an issue that is never resolved as subsequent chapters will explore.

Understandings of youth

Newman's and Clarke's work has outlined how strategies, policies and practices can shape individuals in particular ways and create 'social settlements' (Newman, 2004; Clarke, 2005). Researchers should consider where boundaries are drawn around groups, and the impact of these when policies are delivered (Lewis, 2000; Hodgson

and Irving, 2007). A particular understanding of youth is mobilised in Labour's youth policy.

There are issues with defining and understanding 'youth' (France, 2004).

Psychoanalytical theories have stressed the emotional upheaval of puberty, whereas sociological theories have emphasised socialisation processes (Coleman, 1992).

'Youth' can be seen as an age bound transitional phase on the route to adulthood, marked by growing independence and involvement with peers (ibid.). However, the idea of a linear transition towards adulthood has been challenged. There is a lack of clarity over benchmarks or rites of passage and how these are supported in law (France, 2004). As a result, 'youth' can be an uncertain and discontinuous phase (Mizen, 2002), and there are a range of discourses through which youth is constructed (Griffin, 1993). It is not a neutral description and can 'bring with it mainly negative assumptions about the behaviour and character of young people' (Spence, 2005: 46). Cohen (1997) has suggested that youth policy interventions tend to rest on a conception of youth as a unitary category, overlooking the ambiguous placement of youth and the complex transitions of adolescence (Hall et al, 1999). As a result, policy needs to 'give due regard to the multi-faceted nature of young people's lives and the multi-agency world that impacts upon them' (Coles, 2000: 11).

It has been suggested that youth holds a special significance for Labour with many policies and interventions targeted at young people (Mizen, 2003; Kintrea et al, 2008). A lot of youth policy in the New Labour period appeared to draw on the idea of 'youth' being a time of risk. The Labour Government's approach to community safety was largely focused on resolving the problems that young people caused for adults labeling young people as the main culprits in causing anti social behaviour in communities (Squires and Stephens, 2005). The Government was criticised for allowing a blame culture to arise around young people and ASB – a 'toxic mixture of institutionalised intolerance and public predispositions' (McMahon, 2006). One of the

effects of this is to further entrench discriminatory understandings of young people's behaviour and fuel the narrative that young people in neighbourhoods are disruptive and criminal (Henderson, 2007; Halsey and White, 2008). The result is that many young people may feel unfairly targeted (Millie et al, 2005), resentful of the negative perceptions that label them all as troublemakers (Edwards and Hatch, 2003), and misunderstood by adults.

It is also important to understand how ideas around positive activities in *Aiming High* created opportunities for young people as well as forms of social control. The emphasis in these policies was on keeping young people occupied and off the streets, rather than engaged in some of the opportunities offered by youth work approaches. These issues will be explored further in the next chapter, in relation to critiques that 'things to do and places to go' provoked.

4.4 GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES UNDER LABOUR

The changes around policy making and local government reform, alongside the social policy themes in *Aiming High*, meant there were implications for the way new policies were framed and specific requirements were placed on policy actors in local authorities. Some of the main characteristics include:

- Higher expectations of improved and measurable **outcomes** from policy initiatives
- **Partnership** - with a diversity of providers of public services
- **Empowerment and participation** - with groups and individuals playing a more active role in shaping public services

These three themes (whilst not exclusive) run through much of New Labour's policies during its time in government and provided both new opportunities and challenges for policy making. They are relevant for this thesis as they are reflected in *Aiming High* both in terms of the wider context of its production, and around specific proposals to improve outcomes for young people; work in partnership to deliver positive activities; and involve young people in decision making.

It was important to identify a set of key issues to be explored further in the local authority case study area, and these three themes were chosen to form the basis of the inquiry in the fieldwork and will help to illustrate the policy translation processes between national and local government, and amongst practitioners who are involved in implementing *Aiming High*. This section provides a brief overview of the literature around these research themes and how they apply to *Aiming High*.

4.4.1 Targets and outcomes

The *Modernising Government* White Paper stated that policy needed to be designed around 'shared goals and carefully defined results', focussing on outcomes. Paton (2006) outlines the main reasons for measurement: greater focus and clarity; making it easier to spot where expectations are not being realised; using fact and analysis to underpin decision making and allowing for greater comparability. Outcomes are also an essential part of governments making sure that publicly funded services are held accountable for the money they spend, and ensuring that resources are targeted effectively (Harrison, 2011). As Powell explains – 'it is what money is actually spent on that counts more than how much money is spent' (2000: 52).

The focus on outcomes, whilst present in early Labour papers on the modernisation of policy processes, did not emerge more fully until later on in Labour's second term. There was a shift in government thinking away from 'the setting of output targets

and reliance on process measures that have traditionally been used to monitor performance and success' (DCSF, 2008g: 5). Outcomes (end results) rather than outputs (delivery mechanisms and procedures) were emphasised with the need for a 'cultural change at all levels' (ibid.). In 2007, Public Service Agreements (PSAs) were reviewed to 'drive major improvements in outcomes' in order to 'build services around the needs of citizens'.¹²

Criticisms of targets centre on a concern that innovation is stifled (Bochel and Duncan, 2007), with the focus on monitoring distracting from learning, involvement and improvement. The demand for plans and strategies can mean that resources and time are diverted away from the actual business of implementing policy (Stoker, 2004) and there is the risk of 'learning how to manage performance indicators without improving outcomes' (Tiotto, 2006: 6). In an attempt to improve the way outcomes are used in public services, the notion of outcomes-based accountability was proposed to support outcome focussed planning and practice. It asks: 'how much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?' (McAuley and Cleaver, 2006: 6). This involves a much clearer understanding of what overall outcomes are sought; what is required to achieve them; and places emphasis on a shared and collaborative approach across agencies. However, Paton (2006) suggests that outcomes are good incentives but can be more problematic in terms of measuring continuing performance.

Aiming High was produced at a period in the Labour Government when there was a clear focus on improving outcomes in Children's Services. Rixon (2007) has highlighted that the Government's view of targets is that quality youth work practice is demonstrated by achieving certain prescribed outcomes. However, the effect of this can be to skew provision towards meeting these, rather than working with those most in need. The research will explore how outcomes appeared in *Aiming High* and

¹² From the now archived HM Treasury website: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/pbr_csr07_psaindex.htm

the views of local policy makers and practitioners on outcomes and the impact on their work.

4.4.2 Partnership working

This chapter has already introduced the emphasis under Labour on working with different providers and across professional settings. The meaning of 'partnership' is somewhat ambiguous partly due to its extensive use in policy narratives (Parry and Kerr, 2007: 125). As Glendinning and Powell point out 'simply terming a relationship a 'partnership' does not make it so (2002: 2). The 'official' emphasis is on formally established partnership structures, between two or more organisations in order to achieve a specific set of objectives (Sterling, 2005; Whitehead, 2007). Glendinning and Powell (2002) draw on the Audit Commission's (1998) description of partnership as a joint working arrangement where the partners are otherwise independent; agree to cooperate to achieve a common goal; and create a new organisational structure.

Different models of partnerships have been proposed, although it should be noted that there is no single, easily transferable model (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). Models of partnership can be rational and focussed on specific demands (Powell and Dowling, 2006), or focussed on a neighbourhood level and the need and aspirations in a specific community (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). The rationale for forming partnerships has been explored and motivating factors include: tackling interconnected problems; delivering more co-ordinated services; gaining access to new resources or meeting a statutory requirement (Audit Commission, 1998). There is a distinction to be made here between internal and external drivers. For example, working together to make better use of resources, add value and bring in new people to a process are 'internal' motivators with the expectation that the partnership will yield positive results. However, being required to form a partnership by central government can be seen as contradictory as it is an external force undermines the

notion of choice and autonomous action which is implicitly associated with partnerships (Glendinning and Powell, 2002).

Successful partnerships have been identified as having a clear purpose, and a relationship of loyalty and reciprocity to encourage collaborative working (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). Powell and Dowling (2006) are optimistic about the potential for partnership working as long as operational issues, working processes and managerial arrangements are made clear from the start.

However, there are a number of tensions and issues with partnership working that have been highlighted in the literature. Analyses of partnerships have found that there can be a lack of trust between partners who are involved. Lowndes and Sullivan (2004) have questioned the power relationships within partnerships as the less powerful can often fare badly with their interests blocked against the stronger democratic mandate of elected representatives who may also sit on partnership boards. There has also been scepticism as to whether the voluntary sector can become an equal partner in local government partnerships, with reports of being excluded from discussions at a local government level (Milbourne et al, 2009) and whether the sector risks being harnessed into the goals and ambitions of central and local policy makers, threatening its independence (Lewis, 2005). The emphasis on partnership working does not necessarily lead to a more efficient policy making process – ‘joined up’ approaches take time to implement, and the hierarchical structures of most organisations can be an impediment to joining-up (Bullock et al, 2001).

The message that *Aiming High* communicates regarding the role of local authorities is that they have to improve partnership and collaboration amongst services and across sectors and the local authority cannot provide the youth offer alone. However, as Williamson and Weatherspoon have described, inter-agency working rests on ‘a precarious equilibrium which is always vulnerable’ (1985: 25) and expectations and

contributions have to be clarified and respected. Partnership working is a key consideration for the research – in terms of how it is presented and the guidance given in the policy text, but also the way that it operates at a local level around the provision of positive activities. This will involve considering how different stakeholders manage their priorities and visions in attempting to work together in partnership.

4.4.3 Participation and engagement in policy processes

As this chapter indicated earlier, under Labour there has been a rise in broader citizen participation in policy processes (Hawes, 2000; Stoker, 2004). Lowndes and Sullivan (2004) state, participation is not a new idea, but New Labour has a broad version. The idea of 'inclusive policy' has developed considerably in recent years. Certain terms are used interchangeably to describe participation and involvement in policy processes – such as consultation, empowerment, engagement (Rogers and Robinson, 2004), co-production (Bovaird, 2007), and collaboration (Newman, 2005).

Despite the conceptual ambiguity, it is possible to distinguish between two main aspects of this agenda – as outlined earlier in this chapter, a key element of local government reform was around democratic renewal, strengthening the role of communities and encouraging active citizenship, so that responsibility is shared for civic and community well being (Newman, 2005). The other key aspect is giving citizens more power and influence within the policy process itself – involving more users and groups in policy design, implementation, feedback and evaluation, recognising their role in terms of 'attitudes, understanding and behaviour in making policy work' (Bochel and Duncan 2007: 13). All of the descriptive words around participation imply a more 'bottom up' approach to policy making (Newman, 2002; Sterling 2005; Beresford, 2006; Bache and Catney, 2008).

The benefits of involving residents in decision making and the policy making arena have been described as bringing in expertise on 'what works' (Newman, 2002). It can lead to improvements in the way that policy is formulated and implemented, but also on outcomes (Bochel and Evans, 2007).

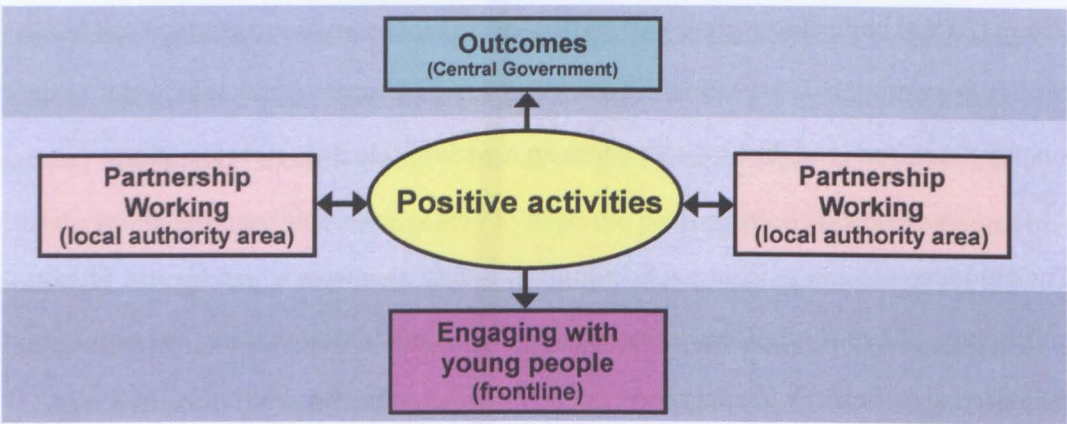
However, critics of the way participation takes place in local areas, argue that closer attention needs to be paid to who is included, at what level, with what accountability and on whose terms (Newman, 2002). Participation is often starting from a low base, having to overcome the impression that 'nothing ever happens' as a result of consultation and resident involvement (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). Pierre and Peters (2006b) have also argued that participation makes an assumption about local residents wanting to invest time in governing, leading to situations where the 'usual suspects' are involved, but inclusiveness on a wider scale does not take place.

The evidence of success from participation in policy processes is patchy and Ellison and Ellison (2006) suggest that active involvement in decision making has not increased significantly. Participation takes time and commitment if done in a way that gives people a real say or influence (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2007). There are also issues with local authorities being resistant to dialogue with communities and users, and groups feeling overwhelmed by the 'complexities of power and interest surrounding decision-making processes' (Ellison and Ellison, 2006: 342) – and therefore unable to negotiate through this.

The engagement of young people in decision making is a crucial part of the participation agenda and *Aiming High* sets out that this is something local authorities need to have in place. The expectations from government will be analysed and in the fieldwork area, the ways that the local authority have ensured that young people's voices are heard.

The three research themes around outcomes, partnership working and engaging young people capture the competing pulls on a policy within the context of New Labour preoccupations at the time. *Aiming High* is measured **upwards** through its place in the wider regime of accountability and outcomes. The policy is not something that can be done by one body alone, and therefore looks **outwards** to other partners and stakeholders in order to deliver its aims. Finally, *Aiming High* has to engage **downwards** with those who engage and use the services it promises – young people.

Figure 4.1: Positive activities and policy demands



4.5 REDTOWN CONTEXT

Before moving on to analyse the national and local documents in detail, this section concludes with briefly introducing another key context for this thesis - the case study where the research took place. This is the setting for where the policy processes around *Aiming High* were examined in detail.

Redtown City Council is a unitary authority, controlled politically by Labour. Redtown is ranked as one of the most deprived local authorities, with many wards in the city falling within the most deprived 5% of all wards in England. The city had seen considerable investment in recent years with a new shopping centre, arts centre, business quarter and waterside development. However, outside the rejuvenated

town centre, there are clear social and economic challenges, particularly around poor quality housing; higher than average crime and anti social behaviour, and a low employment rate compared to the national average. Many of the estates visited as part of the fieldwork had run down buildings, desolate shopping precincts and a visible lack of facilities, which added to the overriding sense of Redtown being 'on a journey' as outlined in the council's strategic plans.¹³

The Youth Services department at Redtown City Council was the context for much of the fieldwork. It is useful to understand what the issues and priorities were at the time of the research. Youth Services in Redtown had been subject to robust criticism in an Ofsted report in 2004 including the charges that there was limited educational purpose in some youth work sessions; poor development of the involvement of young people in planning and evaluating their learning; and under developed relationships with the voluntary sector.

By 2007, it appeared that little had changed, and an internal report into the state of Redtown City Youth Services provided a frank analysis of what needed to be done to secure an integrated local youth offer, identifying problems with performance management, variable and inequitable services, patchy partnership with other local providers and funding that did not match need in the city. A Joint Area Review took place in early 2008, looking at all publicly funded services for children and young people in the city council area. Whilst the commitment from the council and its partners to providing good outcomes for children and young people in Redtown was praised, the strategy for 13-19 year olds was still found to be inadequate.

At the time of the fieldwork, the Integrated Youth Support Strategy (IYSS) was the main focus for Youth Services in Redtown. The IYSS 'Project Initiation Document' (PID) explained the need to 'ensure a clear and high quality offer of support and

¹³ These local documents have not been directly referenced to protect the anonymity of the case study location.

services for all young people'. The solution for taking forward an IYSS in Redtown was a vision for integration around a model of hubs and spokes in each of the 8 neighbourhoods where staff from different services would be co-located.

Integrated working predated *Aiming High* as a policy requirement but it was restated in the strategy as a key goal for local authorities, and sits within the wider youth policy context that included *Aiming High*. In Redtown, this was a core element of Labour's youth policy that was still very much in its early stages. From the initial set up meetings, the overall impression was that the Youth Service was under strain, with an awareness of what needed to happen strategically in order to improve but with difficulties in translating this into action. The next four chapters will analyse the empirical data from the case study area.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has drawn attention to some of the key policy making, governance and policy issues that were a preoccupation for the Labour Government during the time that *Aiming High* was produced. In response to Newman's and Clarke's work on governance, it has helped to overcome focusing too much on the 'bottom up' micro processes, by showing the importance of understanding wider cultural processes and the ways new meanings, relationships and interests evolve, and understanding the 'unsettled and turbulent dynamics' (Newman, 2007: 12) around policy.

The identification of the research themes led to the development of more focussed research questions to guide the interviews. Alongside those stated above, positive activities were also included, given the centrality of the idea in *Aiming High*. The following questions aim to help guide the inquiry of these processes in the fieldwork:

- How is the commitment to providing positive activities manifested in Redtown and what impact does it have in practice?
- How effective is partnership working around providing positive activities?
- How are young people involved in decision making processes, and how meaningful is this engagement?
- How are outcomes from positive activities captured and measured and does this influence practice?

Chapter 2 outlined how the theoretical framework for this research is centred on the idea of translation in policy processes. As this context chapter has helped to demonstrate, there are issues and challenges for the stakeholders involved in delivering *Aiming High* that they will have to address as they work together. Their approaches to these challenges will influence the nature of their interactions, and are therefore crucial to understanding the dialogue and the processes at work between stakeholders in translating policy into practice.

5

Understanding policy as text

Introduction

The validity of studying policy texts has been highlighted as 'policy is made in words and it moves' (Freeman, 2009: 431). Policy documents from central government prescribe certain actions for local government which policy makers at this level then translate into their own set of texts to inform practice on the ground. It is therefore essential for this analysis to consider the relationship between the national policy documents and strategies and plans from the local authority case study area, and the work that takes place in the texts.

This is the first chapter to analyse primary sources from the case study. This chapter analyses *Aiming High for Young People* and documents from the local authority case study, in order to understand the idea of 'policy as text', and the processes of translation around the documents. It also draws on the plans, announcements and research that followed, reflecting the fact that documents are not static, and continue to evolve.

The starting point for the analysis of documents in the case study is that the text should not be taken as given and its messages should not be taken for granted. Understanding the construction, origins, representations and language of policy documents is vital for unpicking the ways that they seek to persuade, construct particular arguments, justify certain solutions and influence behaviour. This chapter also considers the reception and interpretation of policy documents – nationally in

the debates that surrounded *Aiming High*; and the impact these had locally in the case study area.

In order to focus the analysis on discursive processes and the construction of meaning, I have taken five of the categories from Newman (2007) and Clarke's (2005) framework for cultural analysis (which were introduced in the previous chapter) to help structure the analysis in this chapter: contexts; constructions; constitutions; contestations and coherence.¹⁴ This approach offers a useful means to place the text in its multiple contexts, consider the way that ideas appear, and look at past and present narratives. The four main research themes – positive activities, partnership working, the engagement of young people in decision making and outcomes are also discussed throughout the chapter.

5.1 CONTEXTS, AUTHORS AND READERS

Chapter 4 introduced the wider governance, policy and political context that influenced and was reflected in *Aiming High*, and youth policy developments that preceded it. In Clarke and Newman's framework, context also involves asking **how and why this particular policy?** The focus here is on the time of *Aiming High's* production and what it set in motion, as well as some of the issues around authorship and audience. Documents from Redtown are also considered to explore how national policy is presented in local documents, and the different tone and focus in these.

5.1.1 *Aiming High* and its relation to other youth policy

As the previous chapter explained, before *Aiming High* there was a frenetic level of activity around youth policy. To recap, *Aiming High* stated that by 2008 local integrated youth support strategies would be in place. It was also the culmination of

¹⁴ The category of contradictions was omitted from my analysis as I felt that the idea of 'coherence' overlaps with 'contradictions' in the definitions provided on page 90.

a strand of youth policy which has highlighted the importance of 'things to do and places to go', and latterly 'positive activities' in response to feedback that young people and communities wanted to see more of these opportunities. Local authorities were expected to show strategic leadership and commission a local menu of these activities for young people, alongside supporting more vulnerable young people.

It is worth considering how this 'policy past' was presented in *Aiming High*. The document is bold in its claim that the Government's vision is 'for all young people to enjoy happy, healthy and safe teenage years that prepare them well for adult life and enable them to reach their full potential' (*Aiming High*, 2007: 8) and relates closely to the Every Child Matters outcomes around which all children and young people policy is centred. *Youth Matters* is presented as providing the 'foundation for this Strategy', and 'going a long way towards driving up the quality of activities and support services' (ibid.: 69). Yet it is also suggested that this has not yet worked and that the 'overall local offer of activities and support is still poorly coordinated in many places' (ibid.).

The *Children and Young People Policy Review* that preceded *Aiming High* features heavily in the policy document. From the outset, it is made clear that this is the 'last strand' of the Review, setting out 'aspirations for what services should achieve over the next 10 years' (*Aiming High*, 2007: 3). Previous policy efforts are not condemned, but the focus is on the need to build on them. In this way, *Aiming High* manages to convincingly make the case for ongoing reform – particularly around providing positive activities for young people.

Understanding the language in policy documents has been stressed. The terms used in these documents often assume a level of expertise, and the language does not tend to be used in everyday contexts. Policy documents are inherently political which also shapes the nature of the report in terms of its language and concerns

(O’Laughlin, 1998). The language in *Aiming High* is aspirational in its tone – the strategy is referred to throughout as a ‘vision for young people’. Words like ‘empowerment’, ‘innovative’, and ‘new’ (eg: *new* investment, *new* youth clubs, *new* provision) feature prominently signifying that this is a far reaching plan with a marked difference from what has come before. This rhetorical work glosses over the fact that a lot of the announcements in the document were a continuation of previous policy, rather than anything distinctively new. *Aiming High* also relates its proposals to a wider set of priorities and the Government’s record and targets for young people. There is ‘more to do’ to tackle some of the ‘stubborn challenges’ around education attainment, youth offending, mental health and the number of young people not in education, employment or training (2007: 11). This could be seen as an admission that policy up to this point had not yet achieved the results required, and a new focus is required.

There is also a ‘policy present’ evident in *Aiming High*. During the same period, there were announcements around raising the participation age (DfES, 2007a), offering new apprenticeships (Sparrow, 2009), the implementation of extended schools (DCSF, 2008f), a new PE and Sports Strategy (DCSF and DCMS, 2008), access to cultural opportunities and more volunteering for young people. These are explicitly referred to throughout the document. *Aiming High* was also swiftly followed by reports from the Youth Taskforce (DCSF, 2008a) and a Youth Crime Action Plan (HM Government, 2008) which outlined the Government’s prevention and support strategies around anti social behaviour and youth crime. It serves to firmly locate *Aiming High* in the context of improving outcomes for young people, and targeting policy efforts on those most in need of intervention.

5.1.2 Further projects

After the publication of a far reaching strategy, the inevitable question is ‘what happens next?’ Table 5.1 shows the vast range of projects that *Aiming High* set in motion. These were not always evident in the initial document itself, but emerged in the subsequent implementation plans. This also serves to illustrate Freeman and Maybin’s (2011) argument about the work that documents do, and the projects that they initiate. The document draws on other documents and generates others.

Table 5.1: The projects, pilots, and future work emerging from *Aiming High*

Announcement	Policy Document
Young People will have a direct say over 25% of spending on their services (by 2018)	<i>Aiming High for Young People</i>
New and improved place to go in every constituency funded by unclaimed assets (by 2018)	<i>Aiming High for Young People</i>
Pilots in 10 local authority areas to celebrate local achievements of young people	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>
Sub group set up to look into having a Youth Week – given go ahead April 2008	<i>Aiming High for Young People</i>
Youth Taskforce responsibility for a national award scheme for young people	<i>Youth Taskforce Action Plan</i>
15 local authority areas being supported to help publicise the provision of positive activities	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>
YOF and YCF extended until 2011. 50 local authorities to receive extra funding for the YOF to find ways to involve most disadvantaged.	<i>Aiming High for Young People</i>
Youth Taskforce looking at how to improve the participation of young people in decisions about youth facilities, and working with 50 areas to map and publicise what provision is available	<i>Youth Taskforce Action Plan</i>
LGA and NYA developing a baseline to assess the extent to which areas are devolving budgets to young people	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>
National Body of Youth Leadership set up	<i>Aiming High for Young People</i>
National Youth Volunteering Programme (funded by Office of the Third Sector)	<i>Aiming High for Young People</i>
Young Advisors Scheme through DCLG’s Communities in Control to encourage more young people to have an influence in their community	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>
Funding for building the capacity of intergenerational volunteering	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>
My Place funding - £190m over three years to deliver new places to go	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>

15 priority areas (2008-09) receiving additional funding to deliver intensive and targeted activity programmes.	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>
Doit4 Real residential activity programme with YHA for 2008-09. Long term aim to increase the supply of residential activities.	<i>Aiming High for Young People</i>
12 areas receiving extra investment to target those at risk of violent gang crime through Accelerated Extended Schools programme.	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>
9 Empowering Young People pilot areas – testing the effect of subsidising access to positive activities on participation	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>
Youth Sector Development Fund – plans for £100m over next three years to develop capacity of third sector organisations that are good at engaging with young people	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>
Substance (a social research company) working with 20 pilot local authorities and young people to trial approaches to collecting and disseminating information about positive activities	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>
Work with DfT to improve guidance, support and challenge to Children’s Trusts and transport planners.	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>
Staying Safe Action Plan commitment to publish new guidance on bullying which takes place outside school	<i>Staying Safe Action Plan</i>
14 YOTs piloting pooling their prevention budgets with local authorities	<i>Youth Crime Action Plan</i>
10 areas piloting Find Your Talent – three year programme to find ways of offering 5 hours of cultural opportunities	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>
New commitment to drive up quality and capacity in the youth workforce – CWDC taking forward development plan	<i>Aiming High for Young People</i>
IDeA, LGA, TDA, NYA – design and support programme for elected members to assist them with the implementation of Aiming High	<i>Aiming High Implementation Plan</i>

What is striking about the table of actions originating from *Aiming High* is that many initiatives were a continuation or recycling of previous policy announcements; or aspects of *Aiming High* that required further research and work (for example, budget devolution and transport solutions). New organisations were established to take forward other strands (for example, the Youth leadership and the Youth Sector Development Fund). Many ideas linked with other ongoing work – around volunteering and intergenerational barriers. Specific geographical areas were picked out for extra funding for specific activities, for example, extending the work of the

YOF and YCF programme in the most deprived areas. The overall sense was a complicated trail of pilots, trials, targets in certain areas, building on and furthering work that has already started, and throwing new projects into the mix. The different work of these documents make it hard to grasp what is required in order to make the strategy a reality. This complexity has implications for how policy is done in practice, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

5.1.3 The presentation of national policy in local documents

The publication of a national policy sets out a framework of expectations for local authorities and seeks to co-ordinate actions at a local level. National policy is therefore reflected in local policy documents.¹⁵ Statutory plans and strategies from local authorities such as the Children and Young People's Plan and the Sustainable Community Strategy help to explain how the local authority represents itself to residents, and how knowledge about the local area and the challenges for policy makers in the council are produced and explained.

The nature of these local documents and the way that ideas appear in them is very different from the national 'visions'. In Redtown, there was no coherent set of documents for youth policy to illustrate changes and evolution of policy ideas over time. There were no explicit references to *Aiming High*, although youth policy proposals were referenced in strategic level documents that set out the priorities of the council and partners for young people more generally. The annual refreshes of the Children and Young People Plan contained the most detail about progress, targets and challenges under each Every Child Matters outcome, and these did include some details about Youth Services and areas that required improving.

¹⁵ 'Local' here refers to predominantly documents from the local authority, rather than from across the geographical area of the case study, as voluntary sector documents accessed as part of this research did not tend refer to national policy directives.

Alongside these, there were Cabinet papers that showed the operational side of policy – when decisions about resources, or a new direction required approval from councillors (such as approving the IYSS for Redtown). There were also updates on service areas authored by senior managers which were put forward to partnership meetings, or the Overview and Scrutiny Board for further consideration. Table 5.2 summarises the main local policy documents:

Table 5.2: Documents from the case study area relevant to positive activities

Title	Nature of document
Sustainable Community Strategy	Strategic – area wide
Local Area Agreement	Strategic – area wide
Joint Strategic Needs Assessment	Strategic – area wide
Children and Young People Plan 2006-09 and annual refreshes	Strategic – all children and young people’s services
Positive contribution delivery plan	Delivery of key strand of ECM theme
Transforming the Future	Consultation report from event with Redtown young people
Youth Service Business Plan 2006	Youth Services
Youth Services Curriculum Framework	Youth Services
Participation Strategy 2008	Youth Services
City Youth Services report 2007	Report to Cabinet
Integrated Services Hubs 2008	Report to Cabinet
Integrated Youth Support Strategy 2009	Report to Cabinet
Youth Services Task Group report 2008	Scrutiny report

These strategic and operational papers reveal far more about the policies and priorities for particular services in Redtown than the national policy picture. The focus is more on *how* to ‘do policy’, rather than justifying why it needs to be done in the first place. National policy and the many additional funding streams that followed *Aiming High* (for example, MyPlace funding for a city centre youth hub; and extra funding for Friday and Saturday night opening) only tended to feature when a decision was required.

However, this is not to say that national policy is absent from these local documents. The main difference is that the aspirational tone of the national policy documents is lacking – the language is far more pragmatic and action focussed. National policy is often presented as a requirement placed upon local authorities. For example:

- 'Transforming Youth Work **makes it explicit** that Youth Services must provide youth work opportunities' (Youth Work curriculum)
- 'Legislation **requires** all local authorities to secure an integrated youth offer for 13-19 year olds' (Connexions Cabinet paper)
- 'The provision of an IYSS is a **statutory duty**. It responds to a range of government documents to improve services and support for young people as they grow up' (IYSS Cabinet paper)
- 'The Children's Act 2004 is a **requirement** for local authorities to improve outcomes for children and young people' (ISH Cabinet Paper)
- Youth matters '**makes clear the expectation** on local authorities to work with their partners in the development of integrated support services for young people' (Youth Services report)

Overall, in the local documents the interpretations around what new policies mean, or where they have come from are absent. This indicates a multi-vocal aspect to policy, with generalised statements of the 'good' that it aims to achieve, alongside more practical detail on what is required. It is understandable that local authorities focus on what they are expected to deliver – in Redtown, the details of youth policy requirements, and some of the manoeuvres around these, are in papers and reports, focussing on the changes that are needed to meet government requirements. Policy documents also reveal a more strategic vision at times, where aims and ambitions are set out. These speak to the local area as a whole, but also to central government when making the case for additional investment.

The presentation of national policy in this way – without a wider context or explanation – can give the impression of a linear progression from national to local, with local authorities accepting the requirements from above. Figure 5.1 illustrates

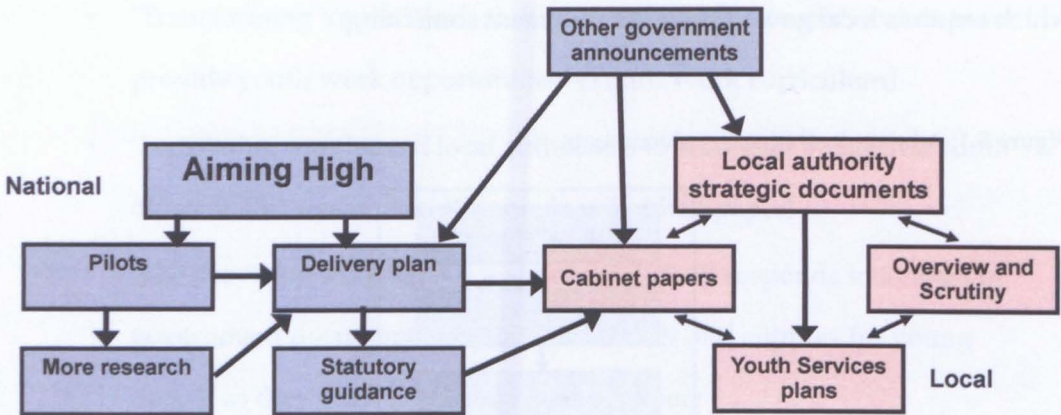
what you might expect to happen when a national policy document is produced which requires local government to implement something:

Figure 5.1: A linear trail of policy documents



However, as this section has explained, this oversimplifies the relationship between national and local documents. National policy ideas still have to be interpreted and are subject to negotiations to find a ‘Redtown solution’ for each national policy goal. This leads to messy circle of local documents – documents in the local authority area are bound together as new announcements require new plans, further scrutiny from councillors, and lead to changes in strategy. At the same time, more announcements and implementation plans are coming out from government which may mean that the local service is already behind in what it is expected to achieve, and further adaptations to the overall local vision. Figure 5.2 attempts to capture this circulation of texts between the national and local level:

Figure 5.2 The circulation of policy documents between central and local levels



5.1.4 Authors and readers

The importance of understanding authorship and readership of policy documents has been stressed (eg: Atkinson and Coffey, 1997; Freeman, 2006). Official documents have a particular textual organisation, and are often presented without an identifiable author, although key actors in organisations are involved in their production (Duke, 2002). This gives the text a certain type of status – as factual and authoritative, constructing an ‘official’ account. Atkinson and Coffey (1997) suggest that this is a rhetorical device to create a reality that exists independently in the policy sphere.

The authorship of *Aiming High* remains obscured. Wylie (2008) hints at some ‘in-house crafting by civil servants’ in a discussion about the development of the policy, but this is not noticeable for anyone reading the document who was not privy to these behind the scenes discussions. The document makes repeated references to the fact that this is a ‘Government vision’ for young people, presented as a joint document from HM Treasury and DCSF, and this anonymous voice is communicating a set of ideas around this and proposing future actions. Unusually, there is no ministerial forward – though by the time of the three year *Aiming High* update (DCSF, 2010a), this was in place, with a joint message from ministers from

DCSF, the Home Office, Health, DCMS, DCLG and the Ministry of Justice. This is a significant move – showing that *Aiming High* moved from something that was very much a HM Treasury and DCSF priority to stressing that the delivery of the strategy was a cross government responsibility, and that one Department alone is not responsible for policies affecting young people.

The authors of Redtown policy documents are similarly obscured. The sustainable community strategy outlines that this is a partnership document, and frequently includes phrases like ‘we want the people of Redtown to become more confident’ and ‘we want there to be greater prosperity in Redtown’. The Leader of the Council is pictured on the first page along with the Chair of Redtown’s Primary Care Trust which visually represents the fact that this is a joint document, but there is no named officer.

Policy documents are intended to be read, and questions should also be asked about who the audience is for the text (Prior, 1997). The electronic reach of a policy document makes the potential audience for a policy document boundless and therefore harder for researchers to fully appreciate who the audience is. It can be seen as the big statement – accessible to all - to make the general public aware of the Government’s direction in this area. It is also addressing a policy community, with representatives and organisations involved in youth policy quick to receive and interpret the policy and issue their own briefings (eg LGA, 2007; NCVYS, 2007). However, it can be assumed that a 10 year strategy from central government is primarily aimed at those who will be delivering it – in this case, local authorities. The detail for local authorities comes after, with letters from ministers to Directors of Children’s Services (Hughes, 2008; DCSF, 2009a; Hughes, 2009b), and implementation plans (DSCF, 2008b; DSCF, 2008c) with more specific requirements for how to achieve the 10 year vision.

Local authorities use their websites to publish policy documents as well, making them accessible to all. It can be assumed that, alongside Redtown City Council staff, other organisations and stakeholders in the local area would access these if it is relevant to their work to be aware of the strategic direction of the city council. Cabinet papers, with their operational tone are far less visible on the council's website, hidden behind the online modern.gov system which lists agendas and minutes of each council committee but does not enable the user to search by content. As a result, the reader needs to deliberately seek these out, and have a rough idea of when a decision was being made. These papers are often 'updates', an indication of 'overall direction', a scrutiny report into a particular policy investigation, a decision requiring 'urgent approval', and thus the readers are the local politicians who read the papers ahead of the meetings where they are discussed.

5.2 CONSTRUCTIONS AND CONSTITUTIONS AROUND POSITIVE ACTIVITIES

Another key part of Newman's and Clarke's framework is to look at constructions – some of the narratives in the document that construct arguments in ways that assert particular meanings. Alongside policy proposals and commitments, there are messages and 'thinking' in documents (Freeman and Maybin, 2011: 157). Harrison describes policy as a 'discursive achievement' as it works to convince others and win their support by 'fixing in people's minds ideas and assumptions which then become taken for granted or true' (2011: 5).

This section investigates these constructions around the ideas of positive activities and the engagement of young people in decision making in *Aiming High*, and where these are visible in local policy documents too. Another aspect of Newman's and Clarke's framework - *constitutions* – how actors might be hailed or interpellated in new ways in the text is also briefly explored in relation to young people. Finally, this

section examines the way evidence and research are used throughout *Aiming High* and in local policy documents to help support the arguments being made.

5.2.1 Positive activities: definitions, problems and solutions

The Government’s 10 year vision for young people in *Aiming High* was based around improving the provision of ‘positive activities’. Ideas around positive activities are mobilised in a certain way to help support this as a central policy prescription in the text. The strategy defines positive activities; sets out the benefits of participating; and describes the risks associated with not participating in them. Positive activities are constructed as something that young people *need* and *should* engage with. Positive activities’ is not a straightforward term. It is defined in the (2007) Statutory Guidance which sets out what local authorities are expected to provide:

Table 5.3: National standards for positive activities

National Standards for Positive Activities
Access to two hours per week of sporting activity including formal and informal team and individual sports, outdoor and adventurous sports, and other physical activities such as aerobics and dance - provided through the national curriculum and leisure-time activities.
Access to two hours per week of other constructive activities in clubs, youth groups and classes. This includes activities in which young people pursue their interests and hobbies; activities contributing to their personal, social and spiritual development; activities encouraging creativity, innovation and enterprise; study support; and residential opportunities.
Opportunities to make a positive contribution to their community through volunteering, including leading action, campaigning and fundraising.
A wide range of other recreational, cultural, sporting and enriching experiences.
A range of safe and enjoyable places in which to spend time. This could simply be somewhere to socialise with friends.

Source: DCSF, 2008h

In comparison with the specification in the statutory guidance for positive activities, the definition in *Aiming High* is less precise and appears to present a range of options. Examples are given of the kind of activities being promoted – sports, arts,

volunteering (*Aiming High*, 2007: 21), and there is a list of the important characteristics of positive activities (drawn from 'evidence'):

- Successful activities are attractive to young people and inclusive
- They do not treat teenagers as problems
- They involve young people and their parents in design and delivery
- They provide appropriate supervision in a safe environment
- They offer ease of access
- They address young people's needs in the round
- They encourage sustained participation and retain young people as they mature
- They are creative
- They are supported by adequate financial, human and material resources
- They support youth workers through good strategic and operational management
- (*Aiming High*, 2007: 24)

The main location suggested for positive activities is schools (through extended school provision), but 'youth clubs, arts groups, leisure centres, voluntary groups such as Scouts and Guides and opportunities for volunteering and community engagement' (ibid: 26) are also suggested.

The key claim that is made is that positive activities must contain a level of structure. Ideas about structured activities can be traced back to the *Youth Matters* period where government ministers were keen to stress the 'growing body of evidence we are accumulating on who does what and the impact certain activities can have on young people over time' (Hodge, 2005). The research referred to was a report by Feinstein et al (2004; 2006) which found that unstructured activities in youth clubs reinforce

forms of social exclusion and are associated in later life with adult exclusions, being victims of crime, not having enough qualifications and living in social housing. This was interpreted in government as meaning: 'just 'hanging out' not only does nothing for young people but research tells us it can have negative outcomes' (Hodge, 2005). This was a selective use of the research, to support the particular policy claim - implicit in the suggestions above is that participation is regular, involves goals and a purpose and is focussed on developing skills (NYA, 2008a: 7). Feinstein et al (2006) did later revisit their research and revise their conclusions, after the Government had controversially selected from it.

The argument constructed around positive activities in *Aiming High* identifies a particular problem that helps to justify why they are required. *Aiming High* sees adolescence as a time of 'opportunity and challenge' (*Aiming High*, 2007: 3) when young people are open to negative influences from their immediate circumstances, peers and the wider context of growing up in a more complex world. *Aiming High* describes adolescence as a 'crucial transition period in which young people take increasing responsibility for themselves' (2007: 3). The 10 year strategy is largely aiming to provide support to help to manage these transitions, yet the 'risk' view of adolescence still appears to form the basis of government thinking around youth policy.

The idea of what young people do in their leisure time has often been problematic - with moral panics around unstructured free time being a breeding ground for bad behaviour and wider social problems (Griffin, 1993). As young people spend more time in social situations rather than with their families, what young people do in their leisure time is an important consideration for government. A statistic that is used in *Youth Matters*, the Children and Young People Policy Review and *Aiming High* is that around a quarter of young people do not participate in any positive activities. This makes the assumption that there is a common agreed understanding

of what a positive activity is, and that this has been accurately captured across the country – and is then presented in the document as a seemingly powerful statistic to justify the need for the policy.

A further justification for the need for positive activities at a national level comes from ‘the overwhelming cry from both parents and young people around the lack of activities and facilities’ (Hodge, 2005). *Aiming High* states that through listening to young people, it is apparent that they want places where they feel safe, that they can call their own and where they can access a wide range of activities (2007: 44). It is worth noting that this describes the kind of youth provision that the Government has in mind.

Having established that there is a problem with not enough young people participating in positive activities, the policy document then seeks to persuade that improving the provision of them is a solution. The central argument is that participation in positive activities will have a long lasting impact on building young people’s resilience to poorer outcomes later on in life.

The benefits of participating in positive activities promoted repeatedly throughout *Aiming High* are that they give young people the opportunity to develop self confidence and improve their self esteem. Positive activities will help young people to manage anger, raise aspirations and make young people feel good about themselves (ibid.: 7). Claims are also made about the benefits of ‘leadership, flexibility and problem solving’ skills (Primarolo, 2010) as these will help equip young people for a changing labour market. This relates to the priority identified in Labour youth policy towards preparing young people for employment, rather than a broader conception of citizenship.

However, in the ministerial speeches around *Aiming High* it is possible to see how quickly the narrative returns to focussing on what young people are *not* doing. For example, Beverley Hughes MP, described the contribution *Aiming High* can make at an LGA Conference in December 2007 as:

- 'How can Aiming High improve the life chances of the most disadvantaged young people?
- How can it help us prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour and youth crime?
- How can it enable young people to remain willingly in learning until they are 18?' (Hughes, 2007).

Within this argument, the greatest risk is around those quarter of all young people who are least likely to engage in the type of positive activities envisaged by government. Therefore, throughout *Aiming High* there is a great emphasis on the barriers for the most disadvantaged to participating – 'all young people can experience barriers... but often they are experienced most by disadvantaged young people, who are the ones who could actually benefits most from the opportunities and services on offer' (2007: 54). 'Holistic, tailored packages of help and support' (ibid.: 23) are needed, with extra resources to engage these young people.

Clarke (2005) described 'keywords' (drawing on the work of Raymond Williams) as having shifting and contesting meanings, and what is of interest is how they are translated into different languages, places, projects and sites. In Redtown, positive activities have less resonance in the local policy documents, as the focus is more around how to deliver positive activities and meeting the statutory requirement rather than what they actually are. The Youth Services describes the activities it provides as including arts, drama, music, sport, international experience and voluntary action' (Redtown Youth Work curriculum), but it manages to avoid any definition of what constitutes a positive activity. In contrast to the 'evidence' from

young people nationally to support the need for positive activities, when young people in Redtown were asked what improvements could be made to services the two main demands were more facilities at times when young people wanted them rather than being based on the timings of service providers, and more youth led projects to make services more accessible (consultation report).

In the local documents, there is no explicit link between challenges for young people and the need to provide more positive activities, apart from one brief mention in the 2007 CYPP which connects increased concerns around crime, prejudice, discrimination and bullying, with an 'added impetus to key strategic interventions in relation to publicising and accrediting positive activities'. The local policy documents therefore do far less 'work' around persuading and justifying the need for positive activities. Whilst not denying the benefits of positive activities, it is instead seen as a requirement that local government has to deliver, and the focus is in improving uptake and meeting national targets for participation in positive activities.

Kingdon's idea of a 'policy window' could be applied here to see positive activities as an idea 'whose time has come' (1995:1). The *problem* had been identified: a minority of young people who were not participating in activities that could improve outcomes for them. *Policy* proposals were developed to address this in the Children and Young People review, stressing positive activities for all as a solution. The *political* stream then involved a change of Prime Minister and the opportunity was created for the three streams to join in a 'policy window' – this renewed emphasis on positive activities for young people.

However, there was also more complicated construction work around the idea in the document. Positive activities are presented in *Aiming High* in a broad and simplistic manner, masking the contested nature of the term. They are justified and asserted continually leaving little room for alternative view points within the policy text itself.

The openness of a word like 'positive' means it is hard to oppose, and the term 'positive activities' secures general approval in the policy documents. This same openness also leaves it open to multiple interpretations, and it is then at the level of implementation where meaning is more contested (as Chapter 6 will explore).

5.2.2 The role of young people in *Aiming High*

In Chapter 3, Newman's and Clarke's ideas around 'governing the social' were introduced to consider how governance is not just an institutional practice, but actively creates meanings that can have an impact on how individuals are constructed and located within policy discourses (Newman, 2005). These ideas can be applied here – the 'social settlement' that is created around young people is that extra help is needed for a particular group of young people to raise their aspirations. There were elements of disciplinary tendencies in *Aiming High*, defining what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for the 'most vulnerable and difficult to reach young people' (2007: 62). This could be interpreted as contributing to the narrative around the need to protect and make sure young people are under surveillance until they learn to develop self control (Griffin, 2008).

However, a different subject position for young people is also created in *Aiming High* around the considerations of how to engage young people, and to promote a more positive image of young people and their role in local communities. Moving away from the risk narrative, *Aiming High* specifically acknowledges that young people face negative perceptions in their communities, and accepts that government policies have played a role in encouraging this – 'rather than presenting a positive vision for youth development, national priorities and local services have been organised and targeted around addressing problems such as crime, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy' (ibid.: 5). In response, a 'more positive and balanced approach' (ibid.: 35)

is needed from communities, alongside young people taking more responsibility for the impact of their behaviour – a key social policy theme for Labour.

Alongside this explicit recognition of a change in emphasis, *Aiming High* sets out the importance of young people as empowered, active citizens, and cites research that found only 14% of 15 and 16 year olds feel they have enough say in decisions that affect them (2007: 34). There is more to do to 'create a whole system designed and led by young people' (ibid.). Despite the conflicting images of young people that are still present in *Aiming High* – as active citizens, as vulnerable and at risk, and as workers, the strategy does show a marked shift in government thinking. The language still has a strong social control element at times – in effect, adults allowing young people the space to prove they can behave well – but the political anxiety around anti social behaviour appeared to be gradually drifting towards developing the positive contribution of young people rather than addressing deficits and seeing young people as problems to be fixed. Whilst there are still definite narratives around crime and social exclusion in the document, there are also positive visions of young people, listening to their views and encouraging their active participation in services.

The benefits of engaging young people in decision making are a fundamental part of the strategy and it sets high expectations – 'public services should actively engage all the young people they aim to serve' (*Aiming High*, 2007: 30). *Aiming High* states that local authorities have to work to remove the barriers to young people participating in decision making and move towards 'supporting young people to take their places as valued members of society' (ibid.: 29). They have to ensure that young people's views are taken into account, and that they have direct influence over some of the budget around positive activities. However, the strategy largely overlooks the fact that participation is far from being a straightforward process.

The importance of engaging young people and the tensions in how to achieve this are also reflected in the local policy documents from Redtown. In the 2006 Children and Young People Plan, it was acknowledged that whilst there was a lot of good practice in relation to involving young people in planning, designing and delivering services, there was the risk of 'children and young people being repeatedly consulted but without, to them, any impact'. A Participation Strategy was published in 2008, which references the national policy drivers (*Every Child Matters*, *Youth Matters*, statutory guidance on Children's Trusts) and aims to 'build sustainable participation at both local community level and city wide level'.

Operational documents also show that young people's views have to be taken into account. For example, Cabinet reports refer to the need to 'help young people understand' about integrated services; and 'explaining the IYSS to young people'. The language here does not suggest a particularly participative approach – instead it appears focussed on letting young people know what is happening, rather than inviting their active participation. This maybe reflects a wider issue of the Government requiring certain outcomes and encouraging participation, as the scope for having a genuine say over services is therefore somewhat limited. The structures around participation in Redtown, and the challenges of embedding opportunities for young people to contribute in a meaningful way will be discussed further in later chapters.

5.2.3 Use of evidence

It is also important to consider the more explicit ways in which evidence is deployed in policy documents to support the arguments made in the text. As Chapter 4 discussed, evidence based policy making was a particular New Labour preoccupation but also highly problematic in places. Atkinson and Coffey advocate the importance of considering intertextuality, and the fact that policy documents sit

in 'a dense network of cross referencing, and shared textual formats' which creates 'a powerful version of social (1997: 61). Policy documents choose what evidence to draw on in order to bolster their central arguments and quash dissenting voices.

Chapter 2 explored how policy is increasingly the product of a wide range of actors, processes and networks. *Aiming High* was also keen to emphasise that many people were involved in the dialogues around its production – consultation events with parents, practitioners, commissioners, academics, workshops, meetings, field visits, evaluations, calls for evidence, and the decidedly vague 'others with relevant expertise' (2007, 15). The National Youth Agency ran 'Cutting the Cake' evidence sessions with young people throughout the summer of 2006, gathering views on the future of youth services (NYA, 2007). This, and other lobbying, was later presented as the Government regarding the NYA as a 'critical friend helping to shape policy' (Chandiramani, 2007a) and that by the time *Aiming High* was published, Government minister Phil Hope MP claimed 'Wylie's fingerprints were all over the document' (Chandiramani, 2007b).¹⁶ However, if the involvement of the sector in the development of *Aiming High* was intended to add legitimacy and credibility to the policy proposals, it is noticeable that references to the NYA's role are absent in the final document itself.

Aiming High also draws on young people's voices and feedback. The *Youth Matters* consultation response is referenced with the 19,000 young people who responded, as well as the 3,000 young people who fed their views into *Implementing Youth Matters*, and the meetings that took place with young people during the *Children and Young People Policy Review*. This is deployed to suggest that young people essentially agree with the Government's analysis – that there is not enough on offer for young people in their local areas, and that young people want more positive activities. This is used in a highly generalised way. For example, given the priority of improving youth

¹⁶ Tom Wylie was the Chief Executive of the NYA at the time

clubs and providing places for young people to go in *Aiming High*, it is somewhat surprising that in the *Youth Matters* consultation response only 12% of respondents said that they wanted more youth club provision, compared with 49% who wanted sports facilities. The voices of young people are also included throughout the document, but in an entirely anonymous way:

‘We need to be involved in things first hand.’ Young person (*Aiming High*, 2007: 31)

‘It’s the first time I’ve felt that I really have been able to make a difference. Not tokenism.’ Young person (ibid.: 32)

Footnotes explain which consultation exercise these voices were taken from, but there is no context provided. Who is ‘young person’? What were they involved in? Which projects are they referring to? This is a device to try and present the idea that the Government listens and acts on the responses received, rather than the more cynical view that the authors chose supportive quotations to add credibility to an already decided position.

In Chapter 2, Freeman’s notion of ‘bricolage’ was introduced in terms of appropriating ideas from many different sources being deployed. The way that ‘evidence’ appears in *Aiming High* would appear to support this idea with a patchwork of different sources presented. Many claims are made for ‘evidence’ – for example ‘evidence shows...’; ‘evidence is clear...’; ‘the evidence underpinning this strategy...’; ‘recent evidence...’. This evidence is often referenced in footnotes and includes other government research, seminars, think tank reports, and international studies. Footnotes appear on almost every page, trying to create a sense of credibility in the document. As Brown and Duguid have suggested footnotes show how ‘writing continually provokes more writing’ (2006: 5), providing a context and mutual reinforcement for each report or piece of research.

Evidence is also provided through examples from existing government programmes – Positive Futures, Participatory budgeting and Do it 4 Real. These are in large boxes scattered throughout the text as case studies. These processes highlight Atkinson and Coffey's point about intertextuality – with a 'semi autonomous domain of texts and documents that primarily refer to one another' (1997: 61).

Redtown policy documents also stress that the views of children and young people, parent and carers, Ofsted, the city council and local organisations informed the development and refreshes of the Children and Young People Plan, adding to the sense of this being a partnership approach responding to the needs of the local community. A specific partnership event was organised in 2008 to hear from the 'frontline' to 'tell us what works, what doesn't and what might'. However, the direct voices of young people are noticeably absent from the policy texts, and feature in a more active ways in separate reports from consultations.

The Redtown documents are far less concerned with showing their position in relation to evidence and research. There are a few references to 'national and international evidence' and 'national research', but these are more often drawing on the particular policy announcements from central government, reflecting local government's role in interpreting national agendas rather than finding its own solutions from a wider evidence base. In the 2007 report on Youth Services, research from the IPPR think tank and Make Space charity is used to help explain why the Government is focussing on positive activities – but this is about the only engagement with independent research in any of the documents.

In constructing the meaning in the text, *Aiming High* draws on pre-existing narratives and government preoccupations, reinforced by 'evidence' and 'research'. Certain

'facts' are repeated, whilst others are silenced, producing a specific knowledge that justifies the policy intervention.

5.3 CONTESTATIONS AND THE RECEPTION OF AIMING HIGH

Some of the constructions outlined in the previous section point to certain issues in *Aiming High* that the text seeks to resolve, but also leaves unanswered. Newman's and Clarke's analytical framework encourages attention be paid to 'contestations' – the work that is done to manage suggestions of alternative projects. This section considers the reception of the policy in the wider youth work sector. As I have already signalled, one of the most controversial aspects of the policy was the notion of 'positive activities', and the Government's commitment to this. There is a tension in the policy document as the language oscillates between the need to provide a universal offer for young people, and needing a targeted approach for problem behaviour. The problems with this approach are never made explicit in the text, but it runs through the narrative constructions around positive activities.

Prior to *Aiming High* this was already leading to concerns that certain youth work values were under threat. A certain amount of resistance was already present in the sector, which the text does not refer to – these debates take place in the wider policy networks of youth policy and are particularly centred on issues to do with defending the core values of youth work; having to provide evidence of the impact of youth work; and concerns around the balance between universal and targeted provision. In the face of this, in order to manage these contestations *Aiming High* reaffirmed the Government's commitment to improving outcomes for young people.

5.3.1 Initial reaction

Youth work has often felt marginalised within public policy, and the publication of *Aiming High* was an important moment for services for young people as critics were left in no doubt that this was now a priority for the Government, moving 'from the margins of political consciousness' (Wylie, 2008). Policy announcements often have a significance in their timing (Potter and Subrahmanian, 1998: 34). *Aiming High* was published a month into Gordon Brown's premiership. A new department was created – the Department for Children, Schools and Families – under the stewardship of his closest ally – Ed Balls MP. This brought all services for young people under the same departmental roof for the first time, and was welcomed in the sector as the 'elevation of youth issues to the heart of government' (Bennett, 2007a). The fact that *Aiming High* was a joint HM Treasury /DCSF policy document suggests its central importance as part of the new Prime Minister's policy agenda.

The initial response to *Aiming High* from the specialist media and youth work sector was unreservedly positive. It was described as a 'powerful ray of sunshine' (Chandiramani, 2007b); 'the most important piece of policy around youth work in over 30 years' (Kelly, A, 2007); and setting 'a new tone in the debate about young people' (NCVYS, 2007). The shift in the narrative about young people to focus on the positive contribution they can make was particularly welcomed (Spencer, 2007; LGA, 2007; NCVYS, 2007; Bennett, 2007b). There were a few concerns voiced early on about needing more capital resources in order to realise some of the commitments in the strategy (LGA, 2007; Roberts, 2007), but overall, at the point of publication, it was recognised that *Aiming High* wanted to ensure high standards of services of young people and give them a say over these. Alongside this positive reception a variety of different debates were ongoing in the youth work sector that continue to the present day.

5.3.2 Finding a place for youth work

A noticeable feature of *Aiming High* was that its subtitle is 'a ten year strategy for positive activities' (Roberts, 2007). 'Youth work' or 'Youth services' do not feature. There are a large number of guides, commentaries and research surrounding the distinctiveness of youth work practice (eg NYA 2006b; Merton, 2004). The main distinguishing features of youth work are: that participation is voluntary; it offers a safe space for young people to meet; it is young person led; and the relationships formed are trusting and empowering (Bradford, 2005; Williamson, 2006; Davies, 2010). It also aims to enhance personal development (Williamson, 2006); and combines enjoyment with challenges and learning (NYA, 2008b). *Transforming Youth Work* reflects these definitions – young people choose to be involved; some of the aims are to 'help young people to explore the issues which affect them and to make responsible choices' (DfES, 2002: 11) and provide opportunities for young people to achieve and fulfil their potential.

However, by the time *Aiming High* was published, critics felt that the benefits of positive activities were not being explicitly linked with youth work practice. In contrast to the initial enthusiasm for *Aiming High*, Davies and Merton argued that 'youth work has not exactly been celebrated by ministers' (2009: 5). It was noted that the then Minister of State for Youth, Beverley Hughes MP, had not even referenced youth work in her annual speech to the LGA (see Hughes, 2009a). The perceived risk is that the aspects of youth work such as forming positive relationships with young people and sustained contact over time (Merton, 2004) are against the tide of policy that is focussing on structured activities such as sport and volunteering with demonstrable outcomes (Spence and Devanney, 2006).

However, this analysis is perhaps overstated. Whilst the main focus in *Aiming High* is undoubtedly on positive activities, the document refers to youth work having a

'crucial role to play in supporting and challenging young people to do different things' (2007: 22). It also values detached youth work as 'an important part of engaging highly disaffected challenging young people' (ibid.: 65). Youth work is not enthusiastically celebrated in the document, but it is also not entirely ignored. The assumptions in phrases such as 'the best youth work challenges young people to have high aspirations and provides them with the skills to succeed in and out of education' (ibid.: 80) are that the Government's concern is that provision is not of a consistently high standard across the country.

There is some evidence to suggest that debates around the distinctiveness of youth work were being discussed at a local level. The 2007 Youth Services states that youth work is 'underpinned by an open, potentiality model of young people', contrasting with 'problem focused interventions based on a deficit model of young people'. The report stresses that these features are still relevant, and 'if youth work is to succeed in meeting its objectives, it needs to maintain that which makes it potentially useful in the first place'. Within an integrated youth offer, the Head of Youth Services in the report makes it clear that there still needs to be activities focussed on 'personal and social development that demonstrates learning and attainment'.

Given youth work is acknowledged in *Aiming High* and there are parallels between aspects of youth work values and positive activities, why has there been so much debate on defining youth work's place, and defending its distinctive space in services for young people? These issues point to a wider crisis in the youth work sector. Paraskeva (1992) has argued that the youth service has been searching for clarity since the 1970s when school based provision became more popular alongside pre-existing community based youth provision. The fears arise from maintaining the ethos of youth work, and negotiating between the needs of young people and the priorities of public policy (Williamson, 2006).

With the changes in youth policy, the need for youth work to grasp the risks and opportunities in new Government agendas has been stressed (Bradford, 2005). Youth work has to find a place alongside other policy agendas in recognition of the increased focus on partnership working in local areas, but to 'not fall uncritically in line' (Williamson, 2006).

The debates in youth work circles help to show the role of policy actors in influencing, responding to and critiquing policy. These processes are ongoing - the document provokes further debate amongst stakeholders which are then reflected in further iterations of the policy and research around it. These reactions are also diverse, dependent on professional affiliations – for example, within the youth work field, the National Youth Agency represents a different viewpoint from other groups such as the Federation of Detached Youth Work and the National Council of Voluntary Youth Services.

5.3.3 Targeted vs universal services

As previously outlined in Chapter 4 and earlier in this chapter, tackling disadvantage and targeting those most in need was a New Labour priority, and was reflected in *Aiming High*. The emphasis on targeted support has been interpreted as a shift from universal access towards a focus on specific categories of young people (Roberts, 2005; Spence and Devanney, 2006). Although *Aiming High* suggested that positive activities should be available to all, the youth club is also re-conceptualised as a space not just for 'hanging out', but where other services should be located in order to offer young people advice and support. This adds to the concerns expressed by the youth work sector about the values of youth work practice being challenged – the Government is prescribing 'acceptable and satisfying uses of free time' (Roberts, 2005: 125) and threatening the voluntary engagement principle. The sector has been

keen to assert the value of universal accessibility to youth services – as these cost less in terms of their prevention role (Blacke, 2007).

The balance between universal and targeted provision is a theme in Youth Services documents in Redtown. The Youth Work curriculum questions the interpretation of the Youth Service as ‘universal’, based on the numbers that come into contact with it, stating that the Service has never been funded to the level that would allow it to aspire to that’. The 2007 Youth Services report estimates that there is a split with 75% of provision in Redtown being open access, and 25% targeted, and provides plenty of evidence of targeted work with young people at risk of offending, counselling, sexual health services, and community cohesion. However, it is also proposed that whilst these interventions work well, they are only successful if ‘informal educational principles and methods’ are maintained.

Having based its 10 year strategy around the idea of positive activities, The Government was unwavering in its commitment to this. It is worth remembering that the evidence about the benefits of positive activities is far from clear. Although some studies acknowledge that youth participation out of school contributes to positive outcomes including; having somewhere to go; learning new skills; avoiding boredom and improving attitudes and confidence (Perkins et al, 2007), it is also the case that there is limited ‘hard evidence’ of the principal perceived benefits of participation in positive activities (Adamson et al, 2011). Yet positive activities remained the main theme of the Government’s reforms of youth policy, and as previous sections in this chapter have outlined, the justifications for them were carefully constructed and maintained throughout the policy document.

5.3.4 Outcomes

Chapter 4 outlined how a focus on outcomes was a central Labour concern. *Aiming High* was published during a period when there was a move away from Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) towards PSAs and LAAs.¹⁷ It falls under Public Service Agreement 14: keeping young people on the path to success. This measures 'progress in increasing successfully transitions to adulthood in terms of increased participation and increased resilience, alongside tracking negative outcomes' (HM Treasury, 2007: 5). NI 110 in Local Area Agreement indicators measures participation in positive activities. Whilst it has been recognised that recording impact brings benefits for young people, service improvement and public accountability (Merton et al, 2007), the main fear is that the outcome regime does not allow for the subtle processes of youth work and the hidden inter-personal interaction (Davies, 2005). Capturing the 'soft outcomes' of youth work is hard, especially when the interactions are shifting, fluid and do not always have an end point (NYA, 2006c).

The Redtown policy documents show the challenges around evidencing outcomes and data collection for local authorities. At the strategic level in Redtown, the plans reflect the central government focus on outcomes – in the CYPP the aim is set out for a Children's Trust in Redtown 'which promotes outcome based accountability and enables more innovative use of resources' and there is a focus on value for money and maximising impact on systemic need. However, the view from frontline practitioners was that 'the culture of targets and performance management was seen to undermine a lot of work with young people'.

Aiming High makes no reference to these debates about the appropriateness of outcomes to capturing work with young people, and there is no space allowed for an alternative perspective. The conflict between wanting to leave local authorities to

¹⁷ Following *Transforming Youth Work* (DfES, 2002) there were annual BVPIs for youth services around – the level of reach into the 13-19 population; the level of participation of 13-19 population; and the proportion of young people that achieve recorded and accredited outcomes.

develop local solutions, whilst guaranteeing national standards reappears, and local authorities are required to measure outcomes and report back to central government. From the positive reception at the outset, the reflections back on *Aiming High* are less benevolent. Two years after its publication it was seen as lacking 'top down endorsement' (Davies and Merton, 2009: 6) and that there was 'inconsistent policy support for its values and approaches (Wylie, 2010: 2). Some of these tensions are apparent in the local documents, closely related to the wider debates in the sector.

5.4 COHERENCE IN AIMING HIGH

How were some of these contradictions in *Aiming High* resolved? 'Coherence' involves looking at the strategies and tactics to resolve tensions between different projects. In *Aiming High* coherence was mainly proposed through the role that local authorities are expected to play in offering integrated services to young people. Earlier on in this chapter, some of the ways in which evidence and research have been deployed to confirm the validity of the Government's approach was explored, and how this continued beyond the publication of the document itself. *Aiming High* is part of a set of documents – implementation plans, further research, guidance, and letters to local authorities followed. These could be interpreted as another way that coherence is sought. However, they also point to further issues, patchy implementation and the reoccurring call that there is always 'more to do'.

5.4.1 The strategic role of local authorities

In line with Children's Services reforms outlined in Chapter 4, *Aiming High* proposed a particular role for local authorities in delivering the vision for young people. In *Aiming High*, it is acknowledged that *Youth Matters* reforms went a long way in improving standards but that the overall local offer of activities and support can be

badly co-ordinated, and the role of local partners and the relationship between each can lack clarity.

Local authorities are expected to take the lead in addressing these challenges (ibid.: 15). The message that *Aiming High* sends is that the local authority cannot provide the youth offer alone, and recognises the role of the third sector in supporting statutory services. Additional funding is promised for those voluntary sector organisations able to engage with the most disadvantaged young people. However, concerns were expressed early on about this emphasis on the role of local authorities and their capacity to deliver, and that the youth strategy might not happen in each area with the 'consistency and passion that it deserves' (NCVYS, 2008: 3).

Alongside the promise of greater freedom at a local level, *Aiming High* has a strong centralising tendency. DCSF is the lead partner for the strategy, ensuring its implementation over the next 10 years. This is presented in a top down way 'the government will continue to engage and collaborate with local authorities and their partners to inform the implementation of the commitments in this strategy' (*Aiming High*, 2007: 83). Beneath this, local authorities have some freedom within their strategic leadership role, and are expected to develop a comprehensive and coherent offer for young people, but with a 'haziness over how it will be delivered' (Kelly, A, 2007). Similarly, challenges identified in the document, for example, around transport, cost and publicity of activities are expected to be dealt with at a local level – 'these are very local problems that demand local solutions' (*Aiming High*: 2007: 58). High expectations are placed on partnership working to try and resolve some of these issues, even though there were reports of issues around disparity between different local authorities and services finding it hard to integrate (Spencer, 2007).

In the Redtown policy documents, this role for the local authority comes through and the need to have integrated services and more effective partnership working is a

recurring theme. The Integrated Youth Support Strategy report stresses that the greater integration of services will improve outcomes; the experiences of service users; lead to greater organisational efficiency; and alignment with national policy. It is clear that managers in Redtown knew what was required.

However, the documents from the local authority show us that whilst there is commitment to local authorities integrating services, working in partnership, improving commissioning and securing improved outcomes for children and young people, the reality of making this happen is lengthy, challenging and in the case of Redtown Youth Services – was not something that could easily be achieved within the current organisational set up. At the time of the fieldwork, Redtown was struggling with the challenges of securing an integrated youth offer.

5.4.2 An ongoing struggle for coherence

The string of evaluations and progress updates that were published in the three years after *Aiming High* indicated an ongoing struggle to find coherence around the policy. The three year progress report on *Aiming High* (published in the months before a General Election) listed the improvements that still needed to be made in order to implement the Government's vision for young people. It stated that 'we have not yet reached the tipping point needed to deliver a 21st century vision of young people's services' (DCSF, 2010a). The same challenges reappear – engaging with those most in need; providing more opportunities for young people to play a role in decision making; commissioning from a range of providers and integrating services more closely.

Research and evaluations from key aspects of the *Aiming High* strategy were also highlighting entrenched issues. For example, the Empowering Young People Pilot evaluation (Hewton et al, 2008) concluded that only one in ten young people found it

easy to find out about activities – despite publicising positive activities being a statutory requirement for a number of years. More recent data around participation in positive activities, collected for the national indicator set also revealed that participation was falling (Adamson et al, 2011). Problems with advertising activities were also identified (eg: DCSF, 2009b; DCSF, 2009c; DCSF, 2009e; Davis, 2009), which stressed the need for a clear communication plan so young people have the information they need to make the most of their free time.

What was the Government's response to some of these issues with the implementation of *Aiming High*? Familiar devices were employed. The implementation plan listed those involved with delivering the strategy – a long list from an external advisory group, young people, consultation with the Children's Workforce Development Council, regional events with the NYA, fieldwork visits, ministerial visits – attempting to show that a wide range of partners were on board and that implementation was being driven by views from the ground. The reliance on longitudinal data that had been so controversial also reappeared in the three year progress report with 'new knowledge which has also come from research and professional evidence' to 'support the original policy hypothesis' about structured activities being important. The 'evidence annex' (DCSF, 2010b) was devoted entirely to the benefits of positive activities.

The importance of the agenda was continuously stressed and restated. The vision remains – 'at the heart of this document is a vision of a country in which a young person's background and family circumstances are no barrier to participation in sports, culture, and all other kinds of positive activities' (DCSF, 2010a). Despite all the different interpretations of *Aiming High*, the Government could still claim 'we have reversed decades of under funding in youth services' and 'fewer people are getting into trouble' (DCSF, 2010a).

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter started by asserting the need to understand the policy text itself, and has not aimed to be a comprehensive review of all of the content of *Aiming High*. It has aimed to show how the policy text is part of an ongoing process of translation, and is not static. This chapter has explored the different meanings and work around the document, and some of the actions it has determined.

As Chapter 2 explained, policy is a messy process. The production of a discrete document conceals many different debates. This analysis has illustrated that *Aiming High* is far from being a complete strategy or vision as the text claims. The work the document does around context, constructions, constitutions, contestations and coherence, means that its translation work continues far beyond the original publication. At a national level, this leads to spin off projects, new organisations to deliver aspects of its commitments and the Government itself repeatedly feeding back with its own assessment of its progress. The work of translation is ongoing: 'the document is a translation that also translates' (Freeman and Maybin, 2011: 160).

The policy documents from the local authority show how translation operates between a national and local level in policy texts. It is apparent that *Aiming High* sets out a series of aspirations and goals for local authorities, but then glosses over how key aspects of the agenda should be carried out. At the local level, the documents share the focus on improving services and outcomes for young people, but the main preoccupations are how to successfully deliver what is required by national politicians. When analysing these local documents, there was a sense that the focus was on what needs to be done, and then working out how to do it, rather than debating the overall aims of the policy.

Alongside translation, there are several other processes happening in the policy texts. Through looking at *Aiming High* in detail it is possible to see policy being:

- *recycled*: with many announcements being presented again in a different format – particularly noticeable around positive activities
- *renewed*: the reasserting of the Government's values and wider aims for children and young people policy
- *reproduced*: where the policy statement sets up a framework to produce further documents in order for the policy to be implemented.

The concepts of recycling, renewal and reproduction help to supplement the core idea of translation to understand that the fluidity and movement in the policy texts is essentially circular, and produces a complex web of further projects. The remaining analysis chapters in this thesis will look at the practices and further policy processes initiated by *Aiming High* to see how the policy goals are enacted 'on the ground'.

It is also important to note that by the time the fieldwork for this thesis had come to an end, there was a new government in place which has prompted another set of debates around the place of youth work, and led to a lack of clarity for local authorities about the status of the commitments in *Aiming High* in the new political environment. However far reaching the vision in the text claims to be, a ten year strategy is not immune from other processes that derail it, change its direction and challenge its implementation.

6

Translating *Aiming High* into practice

Introduction

One of the central ideas about policy in this thesis is that it does not follow a straightforward linear progression from text to action. Instead, as Lendvai and Stubbs describe, 'a series of interesting, and sometimes surprising disturbances can occur in the spaces between the 'creation', the 'transmission' and the 'interpretation' or 'reception' of policy meanings' (2007: 175). As the excerpt above suggests, processes of negotiation and modification take place around policy goals, and these have been characterised as being fluid and unpredictable in the literature.

The previous chapter explored *Aiming High* and some of the processes around the policy text, as well as its translation into local texts in Redtown. However, the national and local policy texts that prescribe actions are largely inert until policy actors at a local level work out what they need to do in response. Part of the policy journey is understanding what survives from the core policy proposals, and what is abandoned or altered to suit local circumstances by practitioners. The translations around policy that take place on the ground involve practitioners talking about and making decisions on how they will relate to and adopt new policy ideas.

This chapter is an ethnographic account of what happened to the key themes in *Aiming High* in the case study area at the level of practice. The main argument here is that the responses from the interviews reveal the 'weak translation' of a national

policy by local level policy actors. The research questions below guided the inquiry in the fieldwork:

- How is the commitment to providing positive activities manifested in Redtown and what impact does it have in practice?
- How effective is partnership working around providing positive activities?
- How are young people involved in decision making processes, and how meaningful is this engagement?
- How are outcomes from positive activities captured and measured and does this influence practice?

The aim was to capture what local authority managers, youth workers, and representatives from the voluntary sector said they were doing around this new policy agenda, and whether any aspects of the *Aiming High* agenda had a resonance at the frontline. As a result, this chapter is largely descriptive, and reflects the fact that the original scoping of this research included a strong element of understanding the implementation of *Aiming High* amongst local authorities. The next chapter will analyse these responses in more detail to draw out the interpretative role of practitioners in translating policy at the level of practice.

6.1 PEOPLE AND PLACES IN REDTOWN

This section briefly introduces the people and places that were part of the fieldwork, to provide some context to the responses from the interviews.

The Youth Services department was part of the City Council's Children's Services division. Although in many local authorities, youth services are grouped together with other services such as the youth offending teams, this was not the case in Redtown. The Youth Services department was based in the city centre where the

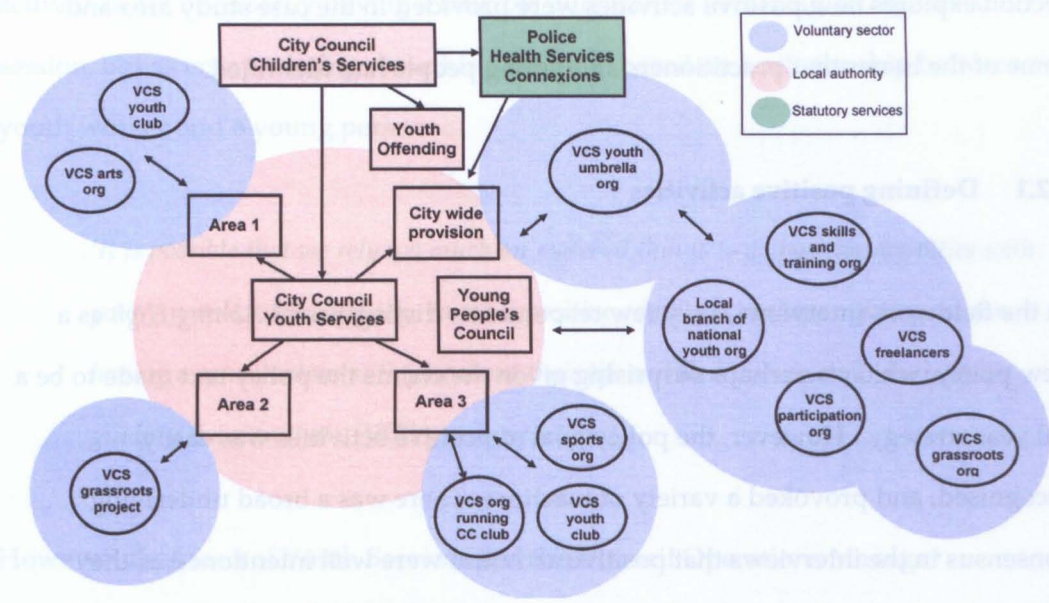
Head of Youth Services, Operations Manager, strategic leads and administrative staff were located. The city was divided into three main areas each with an area manager, senior youth workers, youth workers (centre based, and detached), administrative staff, and specialist units. The Youth Services department provided activities from 14 youth centres, and alongside this, youth provision was procured through around 16 voluntary sector youth organisations. At the time of the fieldwork, the Youth Services department in Redtown had 57.9 full time equivalent (FTE) staff which meant that the department was relatively small.¹⁸

At a local level, there are a wide range of policy actors – including practitioners, managers and workers from the voluntary sector. The local authority is broadly at the centre, with politicians and senior managers driving the process, but reflecting the diffuse nature of contemporary governance, there are a range of people involved in policy and loose networks around the goal of providing a local youth offer.

Figure 6.1 captures the relationships between the Youth Services Department to: other council departments and statutory agencies; the voluntary and community sector; and politicians.

¹⁸ National guidelines under *Transforming Youth Work* recommend a ratio of 1:400 of the 13-19 youth population, which means Redtown would have needed 71.2 FTE staff to meet this target.

Figure 6.1 Stakeholder map from the case study area



This is a simplified version only incorporating the people I spoke to or approached as part of the research.¹⁹ There were relationships in local areas (either commissioned, or working alongside each other on the basis of geography alone); organisations representing young people across the city; national providers with local projects; and grassroots and community based projects that have no apparent relationship with Youth Services. Above the Youth Services department was Children's Services at the council, other statutory services and the politicians who have responsibility for the overall service area. Although Stoker (2004) indicated that his idea of 'network community governance' had not been fully realised, the stakeholder map around Youth Services in the case study area show elements of interdependencies which local government has to navigate through.

6.2 PROVIDING POSITIVE ACTIVITIES

Aiming High reaffirmed that local authorities were required to provide, commission and publicise positive activities as part of their integrated youth offer. As the

¹⁹ See Appendix 3 for a full list of people interviewed as part of the research

previous chapter explored, the definition of a positive activity was contested. This section explores how positive activities were provided in the case study area and some of the issues that practitioners and young people had identified.

6.2.1 Defining positive activities

In the fieldwork interviews, very few respondents distinguished *Aiming High* as a new policy, which is perhaps surprising given the claims the policy text made to be a '10 year strategy'. However, the policy goal of positive activities was easily recognised, and provoked a variety of reactions. There was a broad underlying consensus in the interviews that positive activities were well intentioned as they reflected a desire to offer more to young people and provide them with better opportunities. The Head of Youth Services placed the strategy as being part of a wider Labour shift towards prioritising youth services:

'I found that what came out of government particularly around positive activities and integrated services was the right agenda and therefore one which I found pretty easy to promote... So I feel that legislation that came out put youth services in local authorities on a better basis than we had ever been. And gave us some money'.

In terms of definitions, there was scepticism in some of the interview responses about the use of the term 'positive activities' by the Government, with it being seen as a meaningless phrase – *'the word positive could literally be anything'* (VCS director 6) and a *'buzz word'* (Council city wide youth worker 3) linked to a new funding opportunity.

The interpretations of practitioners and managers reflected the conflicting understandings that were circulating around the idea of positive activities nationally. In contrast to the Government's insistence that a positive activity involved a level of

structure, the responses from practitioners indicated that they viewed a positive activity as not necessarily having a tangible outcome, or involving an organised session, but as encapsulating something informal based on a relationship between a youth worker and a young person:

'It is possible that we rely too much on material things to do positive activities with young people, when actually, to me, a positive activity is perhaps a young person having a conversation with you about their life and their future, and you perhaps guiding them on that'. (VCS youth worker 2)

However, the Head of Youth Services and the Council Operations Manager specifically highlighted the importance of positive activities in relation to the personal and social development of young people:

'It's got to be broadly speaking something that in one way or another young people gain something from developmentally... What binds them together is if they gain something that they didn't have at the start... That's why it's called a positive activity'. (Head of Youth Services)

There was the suggestion in one of the interviews that Redtown had not reached a definition of positive activities meaning *'I don't think it's owned in the field'* (Council city wide youth worker 1). An earlier government 'strap line' – *things to do and places to go* – was referenced more frequently in interviews than positive activities, and for many practitioners, positive activities were indistinguishable from the Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) funding stream, which preceded *Aiming High* and was for targeted activities in school holidays. This maybe indicates that there is a significant time lag between a national announcement and policy phrases becoming incorporated into the language of practitioners. It also appeared that new policy *

announcements were linked to making the most of the opportunity for particular funding streams, adopting aspects of the policy makers' language when required.

There were some forthright criticisms of positive activities too which suggests that there were processes of rejection and challenge around the policy idea, as well as ambivalence. Positive activities tended to be seen as a definition driven by adults, rather than coming from young people themselves - *'is it positive for us, or is it positive for the young people? Who's identifying what that is?'* (Council centre based youth worker 2) One youth worker reflected that government language around the youth offer was not what young people themselves would use to describe their engagement with the youth services - *'no young person says I'm taking part in positive activities to increase outcomes for my well being'* (Council detached youth worker 2).

Practitioners were also keen to stress that the policy emphasis on positive activities had not led to any changes in the way that they approached their work with young people. Youth workers saw positive activities as encapsulating what they did anyway, rather than defining or changing their practice:

'What it's done is given a title to what youth work has always done - something to do and places to go'. (Council senior youth worker 2)

'I think the words positive activities, I mean, it may be a new word but it's nothing new in terms of what I do'. (Council city wide youth worker 2)

6.2.2 The challenges of providing positive activities

One of the main issues to emerge from the fieldwork interviews was that providing positive activities for young people across a local authority area is a challenging policy goal. Knowing what was on offer, publicising them effectively and capturing

who was accessing them were problems that were repeatedly referred to in the interviews.

The Head of Youth Services described the problem as there being thousands of providers of activities that could be classified as 'positive' but no system for collecting that data, and no obligation from the groups to let the council know what they were doing. The interviews with voluntary sector managers confirmed that some were engaged with the city council over positive activities, but others apparently did not feel the need to see themselves as part of a pattern of local provision. One Council employee commented: *'we don't know how good the good work is, and we certainly don't know how poor the poor work is'* (Council strategic manager 2). This was not unique to Redtown - an Audit Commission report (2009) into youth activities found that many local authorities had little evidence of a comprehensive area based approach and very little data on costs and performance.

In terms of promoting positive activities, at the time of the fieldwork, Connexions were running the *Activities 4u* website contracted by the council, and were involved in a DCSF funded pilot which was exploring how to engage young people in accessing the database of things to do and places to go. The website was regarded as well set out and user friendly, but there were questions raised about the quality of the information on the site. It worked by harvesting information from other websites, so did not necessarily provide the most up to date information, and there was no monitoring of how young people were accessing the site. The interim Head of the Youth Services felt that *'a lot of money has gone into promoting positive activities, but I don't know about what that means in terms of the reach for our most vulnerable groups'*. There were criticisms from youth workers and external partners about the way that activities were promoted to young people in Redtown:

'What we've found is that there is a fantastic amount for people to do, but nobody really knows what is out there'. (Police Sergeant)

'In some areas there is a lack of access to resources and places to go and things to do, but also, it might simply be the lack of awareness of where those things exist'.

(Council detached youth worker 2)

6.2.3 Young people's views on positive activities

The views of young people in Redtown on the local youth offer was similarly mixed. At a partnership event that was designed to involve young people in decisions around the future of youth services, young people felt that life for teenagers in Redtown could be improved - there was a strong sense of the need to provide activities more often, at more flexible times, across a wider age range with more timely information and advertising.²⁰ Issues around the quality of existing facilities, transport costs and safety in the city centre emerged as the main barriers.

At the NYA focus group on *Aiming High*, the young people from Redtown expressed doubts as to whether youth provision reached those who needed it most, and that youth centres were most likely to attract people who lived very nearby. They also felt that youth centres needed to be well equipped, safe and attractive to visit, and from their experiences in Redtown, this was not always the case.

Many of the interviews with youth workers revealed that they were aware that the activities on offer were either being seen as inaccessible, too expensive, or badly advertised by young people in the city:

²⁰ This partnership event took place prior to the fieldwork for this thesis, but was written up in a report that was publicly available on the Council's website.

'There's been a lot of developments in the city, and ... there's a lot of frustration - why is everything in the centre? The reality is that most young people can't afford to go to Connexions to sign on or get advice'. (Council senior youth worker 1)

These problems resonate with the description in the 2007 Youth Services report that there were areas of the city that lacked any youth provision. Young people and frontline youth workers were acutely aware of this – and despite the commitment in the partnership events and consultations to listening to young people's views, the same issues were being raised around inconsistent provision over a number of years, indicating that the progress towards a comprehensive local offer of positive activities was not being realised.

6.2.4 Continuing negotiations

On one level, the stream of guidance around positive activities suggests that the government was realistic about the challenges of delivering them, and trying to provide suggestions for how local authorities could improve their provision. The government wanted to understand what encouraged take up of activities amongst young people and knowing what was available and free transport were recurring themes in the research that was commissioned around *Aiming High* (eg DCSF, 2008d; DCSF, 2008e). DCSF then issued guidance for local authorities on how to find local solutions to lowering transport costs (DCSF, 2009d).

The further research and evidence around positive activities was not raised in the interviews, primarily because practitioners and managers in Redtown were still struggling with the underlying issue of understanding what was already being provided in the city by different sectors and delivering a coherent local offer. The practical aspects of the *Aiming High* agenda around positive activities were positively embraced, in particular, the increased funding and the opportunities for young

people. Alongside this, there were spaces in the policy process where their own understandings of the policy goal dominated, and practitioners' responses definitely reflected the imprecise and contested nature of the term positive activities itself – but there was no significant alteration in their ways of working.

6.3 PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Partnership was at the heart of the *Aiming High* agenda - local authorities were expected to have the lead strategic role, working across sectors to provide the local youth offer. Interviewees were asked about: the structures in place to support partnership working, and their views on how effectively they felt partnership working was operating in Redtown.

6.3.1 Partnership mechanisms in Redtown

From the interviews, the Youth Services department appeared to have good links with other council and statutory services, and also in localities with voluntary sector youth providers. As Chapter 4 explained, there are many different definitions of partnership, and the emphasis tends to be on those that consist of a joint working arrangement between two organisations to achieve shared goals (Audit Commission, 1998). Managers within the Youth Services department who had more strategic level roles were conversant in the language of formal partnerships in Redtown, and the work of the LSP and Redtown Children and Young People Strategic Partnership.

In contrast, none of the frontline youth workers talked about the strategic level of partnership in the local authority, nor appeared to have much awareness of what decisions were made at this level around working with other organisations and groups. The remoteness of the strategic partnerships could partly be explained by the relative newness of these formal structures. Strategic partnership working in

Redtown was a 'work in progress', and the LSP minutes demonstrated that the partnership had recognised the need to improve on their structures, leadership and support mechanisms. Other local authorities faced similar challenges - an Audit Commission report (2008) into the functioning of Children's Trusts stated that the new arrangements had yet to settle down, and were often too focussed on managing their complex governance arrangements rather than delivering better outcomes for young people.

In the interviews, 'partnership' was often employed more loosely encapsulating informal joint working between frontline practitioners in their local area. This could be more accurately described as 'collaboration' but tended to fall under the banner of 'partnership working'. Lowndes and Sullivan (2004) identified neighbourhood partnerships focussing on local needs in particular communities as one model of working, and the ad hoc working relationships between youth workers fitted most closely into this description. Youth workers engaged with other organisations in their areas – often through local Council led action groups, or through the '*word of mouth, people you know*' (CC youth worker) approach, in response to specific neighbourhood concerns:

'If there's an issue, I'll work with the voluntary sector, or the police, or anyone who's willing to look at it. If people are willing to make a difference to the lives of young people then I will work with them regardless'. (Council detached youth worker 3)

The result in Redtown was that there were two parallel experiences of 'partnership working' – one that existed in formal meetings, minutes and documents between senior staff and external partners; and another driven by a more pragmatic need to work with local partners in different areas of the city to meet young people's needs.

6.3.2 The benefits of partnership working

Staff at all levels within Youth Services expressed their support for partnership working in principle and acknowledged the benefits it offered. The most common driver for partnership working cited in the interviews was the ability to extend what they could provide for young people. Where partnerships with local voluntary organisations were particularly well developed, it enabled youth workers to avoid duplication, and also respond more quickly to a particular need:

'The other side is that sometimes there's a lot of bureaucracy in local government, and sometimes when a voluntary project takes the lead, it means we can be more flexible in terms of how quickly we can turn things around.' (Council detached youth worker 1)

There was also recognition that youth workers could not provide some of the more targeted work, and partnerships with social services, health services and Connexions were essential in this regard.

The youth workers who were involved with other organisations listed the following factors as leading to successful partnership working:

- Positive attitudes
- Perseverance
- Clear, agreed aims
- A degree of formality – with actions minuted
- Not expecting to agree on everything and being willing to accommodate those differences
- Being prepared for it not to work all of the time
- Clarity over different roles and responsibilities

- Joint planning so partners have a shared understanding of the agenda

These responses resonated with many of the findings from previous literature – such as Lowndes and Sullivan’s (2004) study of local initiatives and partnerships where success involves trust and loyalty between partners, and Huxham and Vangen’s (1996) emphasis on recognising the value of each partner’s contribution. For frontline staff, partnership working was a necessity for their work, rather than something that focussed on structures and resources:

‘We’ve moved away from getting hung up on trying to think that we could reach agreement on 100% of everything, so we identified those areas that we had shared ground and shared interest and concentrated on those, and basically let the other bits deal with themselves’. (Council centre based youth worker 1)

There was one example in particular that illustrated how partnership working could be a positive experience for those involved – the Participation Network in Redtown. There was a strong feeling of the collective power of the Network and having found ‘a common language for deliberation’ (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004: 64). This was also backed up by agreed aims - clarity of purpose and roles has often been identified as the most important factor in making partnerships work (Powell and Exworthy, 2002).

Case study: Participation Network

A few months prior to the start of the fieldwork, a Participation Network had been set up by the Participation lead at the city council, involving statutory, voluntary, community sectors and partner agencies. It was not a formal strategic level partnership but had a clear membership, terms of reference and officer support. It described itself as a ‘representative forum’ and a ‘city wide mechanism to share good practice, and coordinate opportunities and developments in terms of participation’.

In the early months, it focussed on developing Standards of Involvement that could be shared across the city council and other organisations, to make sure that participation was not an after thought but embedded in organisational culture. This stated that:

'Children, young people and their parents/carers in Redtown have a right to be informed, listened to and actively involved in decisions that affect them. It is a duty on all services that this happens consistently and meaningfully'.

Although the network was chaired by a local authority worker, meetings took place in the offices of a local voluntary organisation, and the chair was very clear that the Network had to be a team effort. From observing the meetings in the early months of the Network, they initially felt dominated by the local authority perspective. But as more people started attending and talking about their organisations, the network became *'a force to be reckoned with'* with partners feeding back about the positive opportunity to make new links, collaborate, keep up to date with what was happening across the city, and being able to support each other:

'What we've now done is we're joining forces with our frustrations and we're supporting each other through that, and I think the power's coming in those numbers'. (CC city wide youth worker)

One of the things that made the Participation Network successful was that, regardless of their roles in their own organisations, partners were equal in the network – although this was perhaps easier to achieve as the Network was not delivering a service.

6.3.3 Challenges of partnership working

Although youth workers talked with confidence about partnership working, it was not without its problems in practice. Glendinning and Powell have described making partnerships work as *'one of the toughest challenges facing public sector managers'* (2002: 6). A lot of the issues that emerged in the interview discussions with youth workers and managers are reflected in experiences of partnership working in general:

- A clash between different organisational cultures – particularly over safeguarding approaches
- Sustaining the commitment to partnership working
- Following through on identified actions
- Lack of understanding about the purpose of partnership
- Unequal funding relationships
- Data sharing

- Changing personnel
- Variable attendance at meetings
- Individual personalities
- Local history

There was a sense that it was easy to talk the language of partnership and to get people to come together but *'there's a challenge in getting things done'* (CC manager). The biggest tensions around partnership working emerged between voluntary sector organisations and the local authority. The excerpt below encapsulates some of the frustrations:

'I think there can be a bit of either animosity or unwillingness to share resources and things... Everyone sees you as the local authority and you've got all the money and everything. But we're not able to bring much resources to the table because you actually don't have masses of resources. It's one of the things that is quite difficult when you're doing partnership working'. (Council detached youth worker 2)

The Children and Young People Plan in the case study area had an ambition for partners to work together. Yet at a strategic level, the main gap identified was the lack of formal mechanisms for the voluntary sector to actually engage with the city council. Voluntary sector managers confirmed that they used to be invited in to sit on a strategic planning group, but this had stopped abruptly. They described their relationship with the council as *'a dictatorship'* (VCS director 2). Another organisation expressed that it had taken 12 years of *'being here and fighting our cause'* (VCS director 6) to be seen as a valued partner.

There is evidence that working with the voluntary sector was a particular challenge for youth services in other parts of the country too – Willis et al (2008) in their review of commissioning arrangements for youth activities, found that whilst most could

identify that the market consisted of statutory, voluntary and private providers, there were very few who had well developed collaborative partnerships in place. The national body representing the voluntary youth sector identified that a tokenistic presence from the VCS at partnership meetings was an issue (NCVYS, 2008), and that the sector was struggling to find a place within the new Children's Trust arrangements (NCVYS, 2007).

VCS representatives were also upfront about issues within their sector that could impede partnership working – *'there's funding issues and cultural differences in the way people work'* (VCS director 2). This mismatch between the priorities of the different sectors has also been identified in the literature – for example, Huxham and Vangen (1996) found that small community organisations felt vulnerable when collaborating with statutory organisations; and Milbourne (2009) explains how the managerial culture of the local authority tended to dominate in their relationships with smaller organisations.

At practitioner level, VCS workers tended to be positive about partnership working when they had been able to forge good relationships with local authority workers and liaise over what they both provided in their locality. However, this was not uniform across the city. One VCS manager expressed frustration that she had a club next to a local authority youth centre, and there was no engagement between the two. However, the Council Operations Manager also described a situation where the same voluntary sector provider had refused to work with the local authority, which points to the lack of trust and different power relations between the two:

'You've got all these young people, anecdotally you're telling me that, but when I look on the database there's nothing, no young people. So unless you can supply data and all the rest of it – how's that going to look if I were to show that to political people in the council? You can go around saying all you like – but according to my database

you've got nothing. Lines were drawn in the sand. It was a case of if you want the money then you're going to do this... then the comment was well if you give me the money then I'll do it'.

The commitment to partnership working was there in Redtown at all levels, but operational issues, structures and processes at the strategic level were not fully embedded, and there was not a coherent vision or implementation across the city. There were barriers, in terms of mistrust, fundamental differences, and previous histories that lay just below the surface and impeded collaboration. These challenges have been identified more generally, and it could also be argued that the 'ideal type of partnership' where partners recognise each other's 'complementary strengths and independent interests' (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004: 64) is maybe hard to find.

6.3.4 Uneven patterns

Amongst practitioners, in contrast to the interpretations of positive activities, there was a clear understanding about the importance of partnership working, and the language of partnership was easily adopted. This translated into the practice of youth workers who felt that partnerships made sense at the community level they were operating at and valued informal contacts they made and the opportunities these provided:

'I've no staff, I completely rely on partners to work with me [lists examples] I've good individual relationships with individual workers within those organisations that completely enable me to deliver city-wide events, but this wouldn't happen outside of that'. (Council city wide youth worker 1)

However, this approach depended on the motivation and outlook of individual workers to actively initiate joint working – relying on what Davies and Merton have described as 'sustained personal and professional effort from below' (2009: 17). It

was notable that these partnerships also tended to be outside the bureaucratic boundaries of the local authority, where practitioners were freer to modify and amend partnership working to best suit their local circumstances, as the excerpt below encapsulates when a city council youth worker was describing working with the voluntary sector in their youth club:

'It is wherever that specialist input needs to come from. There isn't a vying to be lead, there isn't a vying to be in charge; there is genuine partnership working there, with each partner being willing to listen to the others around' (Council centre based youth worker 2)

The translation of the requirement to work in partnership into youth work practice was uneven, but the overall sense was that it was easier to adopt than the more problematic idea of positive activities. Often this meant a continuation of existing practice, navigating through the more problematic elements of partnership working, and actively embracing the opportunities provided in cases where this was beneficial to their work and they had the capacity.

6.4 THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLICY PROCESSES

Aiming High stated that local authorities had to ensure that young people's views are taken into account over the local youth offer, and that they were given a direct say over a proportion of the budget for positive activities. The fieldwork interviews explored how young people were brought into decision making processes in the case study area and the extent to which there was a commitment to participation.

6.4.1 The structures of engagement in Redtown

In Redtown, the formal structures around participation were:

- A Participation Strategy and Youth Charter setting out the overall commitment in the city
- Young People's Council with 40 seats split between the 3 geographical areas in the city, and representatives from city wide organisations
- Young people represented on three of the city council's scrutiny panels
- Area forums with representatives from each youth facility coming together to feed in issues to the Youth Council
- User groups at each youth centre where local issues and needs are discussed

As the previous chapter explained, *Aiming High* did not specify how local authorities should engage with young people. Youth workers spoke positively about the commitment to engaging with young people in the city – *'we're taking their opinions seriously'* (Council city wide youth worker 2); *'young people need to be the decision makers'* (Council centre based youth worker 1). The Council's strategic partnership lead was passionate about embedding the importance of participation and engagement throughout the organisation:

'When I look at what other areas are doing and go to places nationally and have a bit of time out – there are some really good things in Redtown. We've got a culture – though in certain services, the understanding of what it is differs – there's a clear message throughout the authority that participation and engagement is here to stay.... Now I feel it's happening all over the show'.

However, there were some issues around how far this commitment had spread in terms of what was being implemented on the ground. The Council Operations

Manager was cautious about the extent to which the structures were in place across the local authority area:

'I use the metaphor - we've got the roof of the house on, but the walls and the internal walls are not very sound. It wouldn't take much pushing for it to come crumbling down. I wouldn't say it's as bad as tokenism, but I don't think it's far off it in some places'.

This view was confirmed in some of the interview responses. Examples were given of cases where young people were presented with decisions that had already been taken:

'When you start looking through that active involvement of young people, you can still see some of those points where you wonder sometimes if it's only because the strategy has said we're just having young people on board rather than making it meaningful'. (Council area manager 4)

When youth workers were asked more about the structures for engaging young people in decision making (rather than just their support for the agenda), some revealed that the user groups were not always in place, and the area forums had stopped.

One of the most positive examples referred to in the interviews with practitioners were around the opportunities for young people through the Youth Opportunity Fund, a process that was separate from the council's participation structures, and managed by a voluntary sector umbrella organisation in the city. The bids for the annual pot of £650,000 had to come from young people, and were judged by a panel of young people. Quite a few of the youth workers felt its success lay in the way that

it enabled young people to decide what they wanted to do but also take responsibility for making their projects happen:

'It was young people who put the bid together to refurbish that centre including the design. They were talking to architects; they were acting as clerk of works, talking to the builders, overseeing the project. So, straight away young people felt some ownership. It introduced them to the fact, yes, you've got the money, but it's still going to take six months to sort out...' (Council detached youth worker 1)

6.4.2 Challenges in engaging young people

Aside from the example of the Youth Opportunity Fund, there was little direct evidence of giving young people a say over service design, priorities and commissioning at a strategic level. In youth centres, youth workers stressed that they planned their sessions around what young people wanted, but this falls short of the Government vision of controlling 25% of budgets and a wider influence on what is provided for young people in a local authority area.

There were a number of challenges that were raised in the interviews. Issues such as the best time of the day to involve young people in consultations and meetings had yet to be resolved – an issue that France and Meredith (2009) also highlight, suggesting that participation needs to be around the everyday lives of young people, such as their families, school and peers, rather than just focussing on public discussions and services. With the active Young People's Council in place, there was also a tendency to rely on the same group of young people at the expense of working with those young people who still want to be heard but lack the confidence of their peers – *'they're forever being wheeled out to be the spokespeople of their peers'* (Council city wide youth worker 3). Criticisms of tokenistic involvement are also a common

refrain in the literature on youth participation (eg Tisdall and Davis, 2004; Sinclair, 2004).

Questions were raised about the level of engagement that young people themselves were willing to sign up to, an issue that Pierre and Peters (2006b) identified in terms of the assumption that residents want to invest time in local governance. One youth worker drew parallels with the level of engagement in decision making more generally:

'If you think about it not a vast majority of the adult population are really actively involved in engagement and decision making. So it's really difficult to take that up in a lot of young people. Rightly or wrongly, some do say – I want stuff provided for me... why do I have to bother with all of this?' (Council detached youth worker 2)

Some workers stated that in order for participation to work well, there has to be a realistic explanation of what the level of involvement is or *'all we're doing is teaching young people how to fail politically'* (Council detached youth worker 1); as well as managing expectations – *'nothing is easy or quick'* (Council city wide youth worker 1).

As Lowndes and Sullivan (2004) highlighted, participation takes time to build up in order to genuinely give people an influence. There can be different ideas about what participation means and how it should be carried out, and a mismatch between the time and resources needed for participation and the speed at which some policy decisions need to be made (Bochel and Evans, 2007). The Audit Commission (2009) described how young people were rarely consulted when local authorities were planning new activities. These issues were still being played out in Redtown - although there were moves to make sure all professionals were considering participation as part of their work, there was still a long way to go before young people had a real say in decision making in the city.

There were some positive experiences within this uncertainty – in the case of the new MyPlace hub in the City Centre young people had not been involved in the planning stages.²¹ There had been a significant moment where young people had made it clear that they needed to have a say:

'The key thing is that we have representative structures for young people in the city, that must be working to a certain degree because they voted with some power behind them - the Young People's Council said they would withdraw if they aren't involved more. I didn't see that as a negative. People panicked and I thought that's brilliant because it shows we've got independence enough and strong enough to say if we do this it will have an impact.' (Council strategic participation lead)

The responses of practitioners revealed their high level of commitment to the agenda – which also could explain how they were more than aware of the gaps locally, and what needed to be improved. In contrast to the previous two research themes, conscious decisions were being made in relation to the policy goal about how to secure better engagement of young people – driven by the practitioners who worked most closely with them.

6.5 MEASURING OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

As previous chapters have outlined, the Labour Government had high expectations of improving outcomes for young people, and within the youth sector, there was considerable debate about how to evidence the impact of youth work. The fieldwork interviews examined practitioners' understandings of targets and outcomes; whether this had any impact on how they planned their work; and what some of the

²¹ This was one of the spin off announcements from *Aiming High* and the case study area had £5m of MyPlace funding to convert an old theatre in the city centre into a youth hub

challenges were around working with stakeholders who might have different interpretations.

6.5.1 Collecting information in Redtown

Despite the national emphasis on positive activities, this was not backed up with a coherent way of measuring them. The PSA regime was supposed to simplify the system of performance and accountability (HM Treasury, 2007). At the time of the fieldwork, although the NI 110 indicator to show the participation rates in positive activities was in place, DCSF wrote to Directors of Children's Services to state that 'further work is needed on measuring participation in positive activities' (DCSF, 2009a). Meanwhile, the NYA was encouraging local authorities to still use the old BVPIs until the new regime was up and running (NYA, 2008d).

Against this backdrop, the Head of Youth Services and the strategic lead for participation were working on improving the way that the Youth Services department in Redtown collected data for NI 110. The baseline measurement for NI 110 is young people's participation through the annual Tell Us Survey – a local survey run by OFSTED of Year 10 pupils in each local authority area. This asks young people whether they have participated in any group activity led by adults outside school lessons in the last four weeks (NYA, 2008c). The Head of Youth Services felt that the Tell Us Survey was not an accurate measure of participation, given that it involved a snap shot survey at one point in the year. It did not provide any scope for showing the distinctiveness of the contribution of youth work – *'there's got to be some measure of impact and outcomes as well as the numbers and the output'*.

Through an NI 110 working group, the strategic lead for participation was developing a proxy indicator, collecting data on the '25% not involved' in positive activities such as looked after children, those with learning difficulties, and young

people involved with the Youth Offending Service. A question had also been added to the survey to try and get a sense of whether participation was regular or a one off. The aim was to establish a separate baseline for Redtown. Those involved with this piece of work talked with enthusiasm about turning something that *'we're being required to do'* (Council strategic participation lead) into a measure that would help Redtown Youth Services tell a more coherent story about the work they were doing.

However, the NI 110 working group did not meet during the course of the fieldwork. None of the practitioners referred to this work during the interviews and did not seem to be aware of it. When youth workers were asked what information they were required to collect and produce from their work with young people, there was no agreed sense of what was required. Responses varied considerably from taking a register in each session, to helping young people achieve accredited awards. Whereas the system in place was supposed to allow youth workers to track young people – *'the reality is ... it's just a way of logging the contact details of young people we are in contact with'* (Council detached youth worker 3).

The interviews contained many criticisms of outcomes. Paton (2006) has outlined that performance measures should assist motivation, feedback and learning – and be reliable, comprehensive, acceptable and meaningful, but that in practice, the systems used often fail to combine all these aspects. Other authors have cautioned about the risk of outcomes impeding flexibility and innovation (eg Bochel and Duncan, 2007). The negotiations around measuring NI 110 did not appear to be helping workers in this respect. Outcomes were described as *'tokenistic'* and able to be manipulated – *'If I'm honest I think sometimes projects are just set up with a clear view of, let's get our accreditations up'* (Council centre based youth worker 2). Many respondents felt that numbers alone were not particularly meaningful, and *'softer information needs to be gathered'* (Council centre based youth worker 3). Some related this to a wider issue beyond Redtown: *'we don't promote ourselves, but I think that's a national thing with*

youth work' (Council manager 2); whereas others were critical of the ability to provide a coherent narrative locally about youth work: *'we don't sell our story – people don't know what we do effectively'* (Council detached youth worker 3).

6.5.2 Outcomes and external partners

Many voluntary sector organisations who were interviewed were required to provide information for their funders and felt that this was understandable if they were to continue to access certain funding streams:

'We noticed a massive difference when Every Child Matters came on board. Funders were more proactive in ensuring that the work that you were providing linked in positively and that you could demonstrate your outcomes. So you either came on board with it or you'd get left behind'. (VCS director 6)

There was acceptance that being commissioned by the local authority meant to a certain extent 'entering the orbit of mainstream accountability frameworks' (Kelly, 2007: 1015). Managers in the voluntary sector also expressed that having to become more outcome focussed was a challenge in the sector, as staff might not have the time or resources to dedicate to evidencing their work if they were only employed to run sessions. However, others were not prepared for this to be an excuse – *'People need to have better training in how easy it is to monitor things... You shouldn't go after that money if you've not got the capacity to do the work'* (VCS freelance consultant 2).

The relationship with Connexions was often cited as a factor that was impeding collecting and analysing data on work with young people in the city. As youth workers were unable to access the 'Profile' system, it had *'created a culture where a lot of youth workers don't send the data in'* (Council strategic manager 1). This was the cause of considerable frustration – *'we're just stuck... to the point where there's mistruths*

being passed backwards and forwards' (Council strategic manager 2). Despite the CYPP review in 2007 stating that all partner agencies should have processes in place for evaluating the impact of their provision, this obviously was not well co-ordinated between agencies.

6.5.3 Incomplete measurement

In the performance indicators reported to the Children's Strategic Partnership NI 110 was on track. However, this shows how a simple figure in a document can mask the reality of the debates and understandings at the level of practice. From the negotiations that were taking place around the Tell Us Survey measurement, it was evident that there were real struggles around trying to adapt to what was expected by Government and help Redtown show the impact of youth work interventions. However, in the interim, the service was using a system that had been superseded, and there was a lack of clarity over what replaced this.

This led to inconsistency, and differing understandings amongst some youth workers and part time workers about what they had to record and evidence. Youth workers tended to see outcomes as a negative requirement from managers and the Government, although they were aware of the need to explain the impact of their work. There was also a challenge in training youth workers to value outcomes, and finding ways to tell the story of their practice, without it being an extra burden. There was a striking lack of awareness amongst practitioners that senior staff were working to address the problem and develop a more meaningful system for the future. As a result, some workers felt demoralised and phrases such as *'selling ourselves short'* pointed to a wider despondency about how their work was viewed which will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

6.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has focussed on the particular policy themes within *Aiming High*, and the views that practitioners expressed in the interviews. One of the main observations from this interview data is that many of the announcements in *Aiming High* were hard to implement in practice. Redtown was not alone in experiencing these problems. During the period of this research, there were observations from youth sector academics and in the media about the challenges that some local authorities were facing in their integrated youth support strategies. Uneven progress and difficulty with new structures and processes were all problems encountered in local authorities across the country (Davies and Merton, 2009; Davies, 2010; Oldfield and Merton, 2011). As Wylie (2010) points out there was a vagueness about what integration meant in practice. Davies and Merton (2009) also found in their research that some areas were already on board with integration and seeing the benefits, but others had uncertainties about the process, and had not progressed.

The responses of practitioners, managers and voluntary sector organisations in Redtown presented above show that the goals set out in a policy text at national level often bear little relation to what happens on the ground. In response to the research questions that guided the fieldwork interviews:

- The provision of positive activities was patchy across the city, but staff were in support of the need to provide a good local offer for young people. There was some scepticism about the meaning of the term, and youth workers tended to describe it as something they were doing already as part of their practice.
- There was strong agreement about the need to work in partnership between sectors, in order to widen what was on offer for young people. However, strategic level partnerships were poorly developed, and informal

collaboration at a local level was the most common experience most youth workers had of partnership working.

- There was a clear structure in place to support the engagement of young people in decision making, but this was inconsistent across the city, and young people were not directly involved in services as envisaged in *Aiming High*. Youth workers often described engaging young people as an essential part of their work.
- Opinions differed over the necessity of evidencing youth work and demonstrating clear outcomes for young people. There were issues with the measuring of participation in positive activities, leading to managers developing their own indicators.

The literature on translation highlights that policy is 'repeated, and reproduced, promoted, established, maintained and modified' (Freeman, 2008b: 4) during its journey from text to practice. This is helpful in terms of understanding the key themes explored in this chapter, as there were several different trajectories for how specific ideas in the *Aiming High* were manifested in the case study area. There were interpretations and negotiations around each, whilst practitioners and managers found ways to establish a locally agreed reality. This involved processes of establishing new ways of doing things, adapting existing practice, modifying and maintaining coherence in the face of change:

Table 6.1: Different policy trajectories of the main research themes in the case study area

Policy	Local interpretation	Local approach	Adaptions in youth work practice
<i>Positive activities</i>	Actively challenging the meaning	Develop a local offer for young people	Maintaining coherence of youth work practice
<i>Partnership working</i>	Useful for extending and coordinating local youth offer	Formal strategic mechanisms/informal local relationships	Modifying practices at micro level
<i>Engaging young people in decision making</i>	Enthusiastic support	A clear, well developed plan for engagement	Establishing and working with new structures
<i>Outcomes</i>	Lack of consensus	Developing a local solution to aid more useful measurement	Inconsistent practices and understandings

Pope et al (2006) described the ‘weak transmission’ of policy ideas around NHS Treatment Centres at a local level, and emphasised how local policy actors were largely concerned with solving policy problems at their own particular level, mixing pragmatism and scepticism as they found their own solutions. This can be seen in relation to the way that *Aiming High* was being carried out by local policy actors. At a national level there was a policy strategy, but no blueprint for how *Aiming High* should be implemented by local authorities. The implementation and delivery of new policies was still in process, with different iterations and interpretations being worked out in both local documents and in daily practices. There was also a string of further announcements and guidance, before the policies had been consolidated at a local level. Amongst practitioners and managers opinions differed around *Aiming High*, and their responses revealed that they were largely concerned with their area of practice – whether it was managing an area of the city, a particular youth centre, or voluntary sector project – contributing to the inconsistency in delivery across the city. As a result, there was a large disconnect between the national and local level.

Another central idea in applying translation to the analysis of policy is that as policy moves across different sites and levels of governance, conscious choices are being made and something new is being created when this happens. In the context of this research, I would argue that it is the **translation** of policy that was weak (rather than

'transmission' as Pope et al (2004) suggest). The idea of 'weak' translation should not be pitted against 'strong' translation, which would take us back to the idea of unproblematic implementation. Instead, the translation from text to youth work practice is not straightforward. Even though practitioners were actively involved with ongoing negotiations, dialogues and interpretations around new policy ideas, there needs to be space within the idea of translation to explain what *doesn't happen* at the frontline, and where policy ideas are weakly adopted. This chapter has helped to show the different modifying processes taking place, which ultimately diluted the policy goals. The next chapters will explore the translation processes amongst practitioners and in local authority processes to develop a closer understanding of translation processes around policy.

7

The policy work of practitioners

Introduction

Policy is 'made' as it is implemented (Durose, 2011), yet there is a gap in understanding what this entails in practice. This chapter takes an analytical approach to the responses from practitioners, to understand more closely what their role and influence is as translators in the policy process.

As practitioners interpret policy and find local solutions, they interact with policy ideas and goals, with their pre-existing understandings and knowledge to create new meanings and directions. The previous chapter presented the empirical findings from the case study to describe what happened to the policy goals in *Aiming High* at the level of youth work practice. The focus here is on interrogating the interview responses further, particularly drawing on the material around the idea of positive activities; working in a more integrated way; and reflections on policy processes between national and local government to explore:

- The influences and understandings practitioners draw on in their daily work
- The strategies employed by practitioners in making sense of new policy
- The role of practitioners in translating policy

The aim is to capture the understandings and influences of practitioners in the case study area, and to examine where the idea of translation and re-writing and reproducing policy features in their behaviour and actions.

7.1 INFLUENCES AND UNDERSTANDINGS

Practice is more than simply working – it is inextricably linked to the context of activities, and involves work of construction by those involved in shaping policy at a local level (Colebatch, 1998). Freeman et al (2011) described the configuration of action, norms and knowledge around practice. In terms of the experiences that people bring to situations, in the interviews, it was apparent that knowledge came from a variety of sources for practitioners, and their influences and understandings included personalised accounts of their training and their local experiences; repeated references to the professional identity of being a youth worker; and specific understandings of young people and the communities they were working in.

7.1.1 The influence of local knowledge

One of the proposals in Coleman et al's (2010) study of the local interpretations around new health policies was that locally developed discourses and frames of reference helped to determine what form services took when they were delivered. The fieldwork interviews gave an insight into some of these local frames of reference of practitioners as they interpreted the wider set of changes for local authority Youth Services. Eraut (2008) has also described the individual, personal knowledge that practitioners contain in their workplaces, and these were also present in the interview responses.

The interviews revealed a striking local commitment to Redtown. Many of the youth workers who were interviewed had been inspired to train as youth workers through

their own participation in youth clubs in the city when they were teenagers – ‘Some of them used to be my youth workers, so if it weren’t for them I wouldn’t have trained myself’ (Council city wide youth worker 2). Older workers were now in the position of seeing young people they had worked with now go through training:

‘Some of my young people, have actually gone off and done their degree and become qualified youth workers. So I have seen that thing - do your senior members [youth work qualification], go and do your part time youth work and get a job part time in the service, do the degree... and there’s been a number of young people who have done that. They didn’t have a clue what they were doing or where they were going, so it has been a really rewarding’. (Council Operations Manager)

Other workers had left Redtown to train elsewhere, but ended up coming back bringing different skills with them:

‘I was employed by Youth Service in Birmingham. So my background was more working with white working class young people who have got lower IQs... I’ve done all styles of youth work, so whether that be detached and central based project work, and as I mentioned crisis intervention work’. (Council city wide youth worker 3)

These responses indicate the importance of the local context and that there was a powerful pull and motivation in this for many practitioners – working in the place where they had first experienced youth work. Although there were other workers who had less of a connection with Redtown as a place, the responses in some of the interviews gave the impression of their being a close family of workers, inspiring each other between generations from within the same city, rather than drawing in workers from outside. In this sense, the frames of reference that local practitioners drew on tended to be inward facing.

The power of the local context was also evident through the influence of local histories that at times could limit what could be achieved, due to mistrust that had built up over the years. For example, one of the explanations provided by a local authority youth worker and a voluntary sector manager for the issues with partnership working between the sectors was attributed to historical relations: *'it's still very much like, a 1990s perceptions of the city council'* (Council senior youth worker 2); and *'there's a lack of trust that comes from... a lot of voluntary organisations being let down by youth workers in the past'* (VCS director 4).

The role of local knowledge could be seen as positive and enabling amongst those who had been involved in changes happening under integrated services, and had refreshed their understandings as a result. For example, one youth worker who had been involved in a pilot in one part of Redtown for integrated working across 0-19 services was notably enthusiastic about changes in youth work and acknowledged that she was different in this attitude to colleagues because she had been involved from the start.

'I'm a real advocate of the way things are moving forward... I was put on the change team for integrated services, and was sitting alongside strategic leads and heads of services – I was only 23 at the time. It was daunting being in that situation, but I felt that I was put into that group because as they were talking about changes to services and the way things were working in the future, I was trying to be the level headed one on the ground saying I don't know if that will work'. (Council centre based youth worker 3)

Locally developed and held understandings influenced workers and these often came from their past experiences in the same geographical area. These then interacted with, and at times contradicted more individual forms of knowledge experienced elsewhere or through their training:

'I think youth work has changed in that sense because from the times when I used to go to youth centres, it was about table tennis, and snooker, pool, whatever it was. But I think with the development of the curriculum that the Youth Service has had with each, coinciding with the youth plan that they have for each city, I think that then, there's more of a structure. The aims are a little bit more clear'. (Council city wide youth worker 3)

The younger youth worker quoted above had directly experienced what she saw as an older style of youth work, but had embraced the more recent shifts in her own youth work practice. There was a willingness and confidence of younger workers to challenge locally held frames of reference and adapt. A later section of this chapter will explore the strategies that practitioners employed within the changing context of youth work, in more depth.

7.1.2 Professional identities

The previous chapter emphasised how in new integrated working practices negotiations are required around different professional identities, and the need to compromise and recognise the value of everyone's contribution (eg: Williamson and Weatherspoon, 1985; Huxham and Vangen, 1996; Daniels et al, 2007). As Redtown was in the middle of developing its Integrated Youth Support Strategy, the tensions around this requirement were frequently manifested in the interview responses. These related to being required to adopt new professional practices and work in different settings as well as the wider backdrop of debates in the youth sector around the direction that youth work practice was moving in. Practitioners have codified knowledge that they bring to their workplaces from their specific professional cultures, which provides a set of values and practices (Bloor & Dawson, 1994; Eraut,

2008). This section explores how this knowledge was reflected in the way that practitioners talked about their work.

As Chapter 5 explored, there have been debates about Labour's youth policy and its impact on youth work. Youth services have had to adapt to changing policy objectives, and work with specific cohorts of young people, and other agencies (Payne, 2007). More structured and defined 'positive activities' with measurable outcomes can be viewed as challenging incremental work with young people where the impact might not be visible until much further down the line; and creating a divide between targeted work and a universal offer open to all young people. These wider arguments and concerns were a key influence on the knowledge and understandings that practitioners brought to their work in Redtown, as they expressed their professional knowledge and need to defend it. The distinctiveness of youth work underpinned a lot of the discussions, and the potential loss of the voluntary relationship between youth workers and young people was repeatedly referred to at all levels:

'Some of us believe that we're losing what's true to the Youth Service in terms of that voluntary relationship'. (Council area manager 4)

'Youth workers have a unique relationship with young people that differs from other professions'. (Council senior youth worker 1)

'It's a strange service and profession in terms of young people taking part because they choose to, not because they have to'. (VCS director 2)

Maintaining this was seen as vitally important, as it meant that youth workers were focussed on young people's agenda and *'not the government's and not what adults are deciding is best for young people'* (Council centre based youth worker 1). Many of the

responses involved describing youth work as a unique practice, where workers had an ability to relate to young people in a way that other services could not. This was often referred to in language that implied youth work was under threat: *'what worries me is that youth workers are diluted into other professions where everyone is calling themselves youth workers'* (Council city wide youth worker 3). Youth work was celebrated as tough but rewarding – a job that was beyond normal work boundaries:

'One of the other things I say to students when I go and talk at De Montfort Uni is that don't think this is a 9-5 job Mon-Fri... This is not a nice job but a job that can give you some of the most wonderful challenges and experiences – when I think about some of the things I've had in my career, people have said to me 'you get paid to do that?' And you think, yes actually... OK sometimes you can throttle them. But there have been some of the most wonderful experiences that I've had with young people'.

(Council Operations Manager)

Several of the interviewees had a long view back over their experiences as a youth worker, seeing different understandings of practice during that time. Their perspectives were at times contradictory:

'I mean way back originally there was never an emphasis on what you were providing in a youth work setting. Going into the session then basically your role then was to police and being a provider of a tuck shop. And that was how it used to be back in the day. But, then, I mean, I'm going back, probably about 12 years'. (VCS director 6)

Although these comments imply that this was far from ideal as a model, others felt that youth work practice had changed irretrievably, and what they had known throughout their careers had all but vanished:

'I'm glad I'm coming towards the end of my youth work, rather than just starting out in it. My training was back in the day, I'm trained as a community youth worker; there's no emphasis on community work now; we're expected to work with young people in isolation from their family and community. I come from the idealist branch of youth work, and it tends to be more focused on technicians now'. (Council detached youth worker 1)

The balance between providing targeted work and universal work was at the heart of many of the deliberations at managerial level. The Head of Youth Services and the Cabinet lead for Children's Services were upfront in their responses that targeted youth support was an essential part of the local youth offer – *'in order for us to meet our targets, we have to do lots of targeted work'* (Cabinet member). The Operations Manager did not see this in such a straightforward way, stating that the tension between the universal offer and the targeted offer *'hasn't played itself out yet'*, and the Youth Service had to define its role in targeted work. Whilst being requested at many tables was good, the Youth Service was not *'the fourth emergency service'* and not in the business of *'shifting people off street corners'* (Council Operations Manager). The idea of a *'fourth emergency service'* was something referred to repeatedly within the Youth Service, as other youth workers used that phrase to describe their views on targeted work – again indicating the manner in which locally developed narratives circulated between practitioners.

In the case study area, many youth workers were aware that their every day work was changing – as professionals who were grasping the realities of more fluid, and collaborative working practices that challenged their traditional professional roles (Daniels et al, 2007). They were positioning themselves in relation to new policies – and in particular the requirement for integrated working.

Some of these positions were enthusiastic – particularly for the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).²² Not all youth workers were involved with the CAF, but those who were identified it as a positive development for youth workers as they were now seen in a positive light:

'We're looked upon as a profession now rather than just some people who - I think people used to perceive that youth workers were unqualified people who out of the goodness of the hearts were opening up clubs for people to go to'. (Council centre based youth worker 3)

It enabled workers to advocate for young people and ensure that *'the young person gets the best of all the services'* (Council detached youth worker 2). As a result of this contact with other professions, the visibility of youth work also benefited – *'we understand each other's practice... and that we're all accountable to each other, and as a result of that young people are getting access to specialists and services that are out there'* (Council senior youth worker 1). Another worker described how in the past if she had tried to engage with a school to resolve a problem with a young person, she wouldn't have known who to go to:

'Now I understand what an educational welfare officer does... it's just knowing the people and the different professional so when young people are coming to me with issues, now I know how to deal with them on a really fast track basis. That's the most important part of it'. (Council centre based youth worker 3)

As Daniels et al (2007) found in their research – understanding the rules of different professional practice was one of the main changes that practitioners had to adapt to under Every Child Matters. Whereas youth workers could accept working with young people without having their details, colleagues from a social services

²² The CAF is a method for assessing needs for children and young people to support earlier intervention and to improve joint working and communication between practitioners.

perspective did not share this approach which had led to some *'operational difficulties that were quite thorny'* (Council strategic manager 2). There were also challenges around the extra workload required through integrated services. The Head of Youth Services had told youth workers that they should not get too involved with casework:

'A message was sent out about why are their capacity issues? You shouldn't be a lead worker and you should just be feeding in to the CAF. But that's not the reality'.

(Council senior youth worker 1).

An area manager also reflected that:

'We haven't agreed what workers should do. People in the field are crying out for guidance. CAFs take time – at the expense of our face to face work... it is impacting on the job description'. (Council area manager 2)

7.1.3 Understandings of young people

Alongside the internally facing local frames of reference and the wider context of changes to professional identity and practice, the social policy context also influenced practitioners. Chapter 4 highlighted that *Aiming High* was produced at a time when the Labour Government was particularly focussed on issues around social exclusion, and emphasising rights and responsibilities. There was also a tendency to see youth as a time of risk. In some of the interviews, workers drew on influences from these already circulating narratives around youth policy.

Youth workers and voluntary sector projects based out in the suburbs of the city were often very aware that they were working in places with a multitude of social

problems – the kind of neighbourhoods described by the Government at the time as being unable to support young people to achieve positive outcomes. For example:

'It's got very high levels of deprivation... It's got high levels of crime and the second highest teenage pregnancy rate for the city. The school – failed their Ofsted five times in a row and were in special measures'. (Council centre based youth worker 2)

In this context, the problems that young people were described as facing often reflected the lack of choice that poorer areas offered:

'Being lost and falling through the net at a really early age and no one's tracking that. And then being at a real disadvantage as that determines your life. The lack of being given the opportunity to identify anything that you're good at'. (Council senior youth worker 1)

Although these responses were based on very real and immediate experiences of working in communities over time, and understanding the challenges being faced, they did echo wider discourses on social exclusion, inevitably picking up on the language in policy documents that sets out that it is *these* areas and *these* people who require interventions. However, this was not accepted uncritically - negative media perceptions of young people were often referenced in the interviews, as well as the view that *Aiming High* was part of the anti social behaviour discourse:

'This huge move towards criminalising young people We're dictating what they can do where they can go, how they should behave, who they should hang around with, their group sizes, all of that'. (Council senior youth worker 2)

When respondents were asked for examples of how their work had made a difference with young people, this prompted lengthy anecdotes and a positive

understanding of young people in many cases. Although these tended to start with young people who were behaving anti socially, or causing a problem in their local area, the stories showed how this situation could be turned around - and the extent to which the workers felt that they could make a difference. There were many excerpts that could have been included from the fieldwork, but the following two stood out in particular:

'One young person for example, she used to attend the youth centre and she still does - she was well renowned in the area for her ASB, graffiti, stealing, she's got a criminal record. And basically every agency knew this girl but for some reason everyone had a bit of a soft spot for her even though she was an absolute nightmare. And she was about to receive an ASBO which would have meant she wouldn't have been allowed on the street she lives in so she would have had to move house. So there was a big uproar and a lot of people came together with her and we asked the police and Redtown ASB unit and we said if we start putting together a package of activities that she can engage with, and she commits to doing this can we try and turn this around. I don't think that's ever been done before, where we've been able to stop an ASBO going through. We set up things like she started volunteering on the sports award and was doing work with kids in schools over half term. Since then, she's completely changed her life around - she was at college, she's started work at Redtown uni, and did a week volunteering for the Fire Service. She did some volunteering for me too and now she's interested in doing youth work. That's just from people coming together trying to find activities for her to get involved in'. (Council centre based youth worker 3)

'I can think of loads of different things. It's just so hard to put it in perspective. You know, young volunteers, we've got young people who volunteer for the intergenerational group. Which is brilliant because we've got community members off the estate here and then young people, who aren't in school, coming in and

teaching them how to use the computers in their own time for no money... I think this centre's starting to become quite a magnet now for young people. They want to be here. And they don't want to be bad. They want to do positive things. It's a nice building too which makes a difference'. (Council centre based youth worker 2)

Atkinson and Coffey (1997) have highlighted the role of 'chronicles', or retelling experiences, events and happenings in interviews. Interviewees often refer to good practice, overcoming adversity and explaining what worked well to showcase 'success stories'. In the first extract, the youth worker was instrumental in finding a turning point in the young person's story; and in the second, helping to shape a positive environment that young people benefit from. These stories show the subtleties of youth work and that it cannot always be easily captured in figures and external measures. When this is considered in the context of the Government emphasising that a small minority of young people required support in order to engage constructively with positive activities, and fears that youth work was changing permanently, then the optimistic tone and defence of young people, as well as the focus on individual achievement from youth workers' interventions in the stories is understandable.

Bloor and Dawson (1994) have discussed how professional identity is not a straightforward idea, with complex processes and different individuals at different levels over time. They suggest that during periods of change, professionals can refer to their traditions and existing belief systems, maintaining a status quo, or professional values can lead to a transforming influence. The former seemed to be apparent in the case study area, as practitioners drew on their professional knowledge to provide legitimacy to their work in an unsettled environment.

This section has focussed on the knowledge that practitioners bring to their roles. The way that these issues arose in the fieldwork were often threaded through more

mundane and routine descriptions of their work. It is not always evident how these local narratives and professional understandings influenced how policy was being implemented, or what changed as a result (as other studies have claimed). However, it is important to explore this backdrop to the daily work of practitioners, to appreciate the influences, beliefs and priorities that shaped their approaches, and what understandings they brought to negotiations and translations around new policies. As the practitioners in the fieldwork were acutely aware that their practice was on the cusp of change, the influence of their locally derived career histories, identities as youth workers and references to wider understandings of the role of youth work all helped to illustrate what Durose has described as 'the embedded narrative from the frontline itself' (2011: 991).

7.2 THE STRATEGIES OF PRACTITIONERS

The idea of uncertainty in daily practice is a powerful one in the literature and encourages a focus on what practitioners do to resolve the ambiguities they face. These behaviours can be non-routine – involving improvisation and discretion on the part of practitioners (Durose, 2011). Alongside this, there are more mundane strategies and discretion (Painter, 2006) that are visible as practitioners employ techniques to adapt to new policy in their practice. They have been described as 'practical judgments' situated in routine practices, but guiding practitioners to an acceptable resolution (Wagenaar, 2004). These micro level processes are largely taken for granted ideas and beliefs that can be hard to observe as a researcher (Pritzlaff and Nullmeier, 2011). The aim of this section is to understand where some of these processes might have appeared in the case study area.

7.2.1 Local learning practices

One of the central ideas around learning in the interpretive literature is that it is social, with active exchanges and interactions between people, rather than the passive reception of knowledge. This contributes to the sense of uncertainty and incompleteness that the idea of translation highlights - policy is reproduced and reworked as practitioners share their knowledge and understanding about new policy. Wenger has also suggested that knowledge in organisations has to be actively managed – 'knowing is not merely an individual experience, but one of exchanging and contributing knowledge to a community' (2004: 1). One of the issues that the previous chapter explored was the lack of a locally communicated vision around new policy in the case study area. With this in mind, this section examines what opportunities practitioners had to develop their learning about new policies which helps to set the context of the strategies they used in making sense of new policy.

Ideas around collectivities of practice (Roberts, 2006) were introduced in Chapter 2 to explain how individuals in organisations are often brought together in project groups. Through these groupings, practitioners share their experiences through interpretive communities of meaning. Wenger's knowledge management theory also describes how organisational goals have to 'connect to the daily work and concerns of community members so they will find relevance and personal value in participating' (2004: 4). However, in Redtown, these connections were not being made, and rather than actively working to make aspects of new policies and requirements relevant to staff, the impression was that staff were largely operating in silos. For example, there seemed to be limited opportunities for workers to sit down and go through the changes, and as a result, youth workers described learning as a very individualised process, and something that they had to take responsibility for themselves:

'I need to do some stuff off my own back and not rely on the service to share. I think a lot of it also depends on us... on how often we as a service meet to be able to share experiences, what's going on in the city, what the new agendas are, and we don't do a lot... we don't do enough of that now'. (Council city wide youth worker 2)

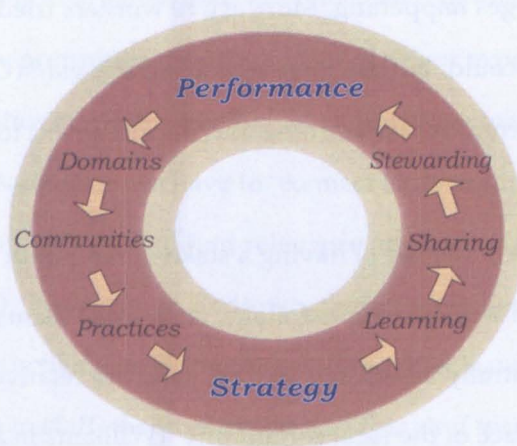
'There's also a responsibility for your own awareness as a professional and I would say that I emphasise knowing what's coming out and not resisting new papers, understanding what they mean and the impact on me as a professional'. (Council city wide youth worker 1)

Others referred *'finding out by accident'* (Council senior youth worker 1) when new policies arrived. Those who had taken the time to become up to date with new strategies, felt they were not empowered to make suggestions to their managers on the operational side of the Service – *'I don't feel it's my position to sit down... and present that to anybody, because then it's like, who do you think you are?'* (Council senior youth worker 2). As a result, it was possible for some staff to remain removed and detached from the changes happening. More active workers tried to educate themselves where they could, but felt there was a *'massive gulf'* (Council senior youth worker 1) around opportunities for learning and improvement for youth workers.

The lack of involvement or feeling of having a stake in the Youth Service came up repeatedly. Many youth workers worked alone, or in small teams in youth centres that are far from the centrally based staff so their roles are relatively isolated, low profile, and *'at the coalface of the local community'* (Williamson and Weatherspoon, 1985; 6). Meetings with all staff present were rare, as were the opportunities to meet to share experiences and discuss new agendas. A few youth workers felt that email notifications worked to an extent, but meeting face to face would allow workers to exchange knowledge.

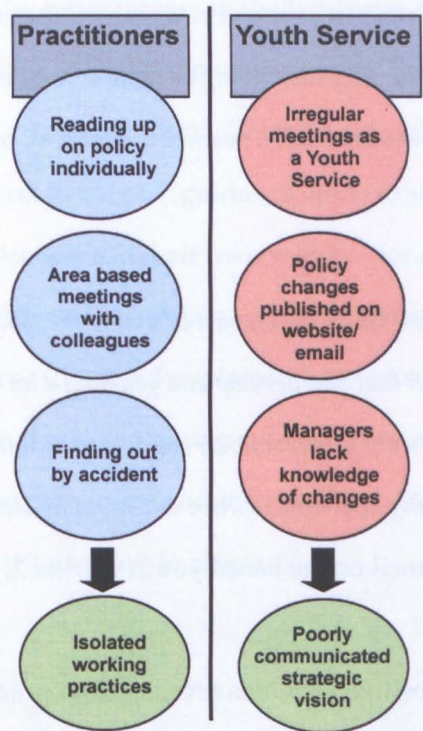
Wenger's knowledge management theory is useful in stressing the need for learning to be a cyclical process (see Figure 7.1 below), with enabling structures to translate insights from practitioners into strategic knowledge for the organisation – so 'the management of knowledge assets closes the loop connecting strategy and performance' (2004: 5). Similarly, Eraut (2008) emphasised the support and feedback required to help develop practitioners' learning, and that there needed to be the opportunity to consult with and work alongside others. These sharing processes, collective deliberations and feedback loops did seem to be largely absent resulting in staff feeling disempowered in the policy process locally: *'it's down to not having the space and time to really debate and discuss as a service and get our head around where we're going'* (Council city wide youth worker 1). As a result their capacity to create new knowledge and new practices was limited, as Figure 7.2 captures. In contrast with Wenger's model, the supportive links and mutual reinforcement are absent between practitioners and the strategic level of the local authority.

Figure 7.1: The doughnut model of knowledge management



Source: Wenger, 2004: 2

Figure 7.2 Learning Processes in Redtown



7.2.2 Strategies and techniques in translating new policies

As Chapter 6 established practitioners in the case study area did not share a local vision of the changes in youth policy required by *Aiming High* and integrated services, and that elements of the new agenda were being delivered in different ways on the ground. In addition there, were few opportunities for practitioners to share and develop their learning. This section focuses on the strategies practitioners adopted in order to ‘cope’.

Personalising

The previous chapter discussed the definitional void around the idea of positive activities. In their responses, practitioners often personalised their definitions of positive activities, stressing that this account was theirs, and what it meant ‘to me’:

'To me, positive activity can be issue based where it doesn't necessarily have to be something physical that they do, as long as there is somewhere that they can access a service. To me, that is what I call a positive activity'. (Council city wide youth worker 3)

'We have two open sessions a night; part of that is the, you know, general table tennis and pool, but through that you develop and generate a lot of discussion with young people. For me that's a positive activity because that conversation that you have could lead to something else with positive outcomes for us as a club and for that young person'. (Council centre based youth worker 2)

The discussions around positive activities revealed that practitioners and managers actively questioned the meaning of the term, again indicating individual and personalised approaches to understanding the policy and applying it to their own local context:

'Can it be seen as having fun? Or is it positive to work with just four people but do something really focused and targeted? So I struggle with... I think both should be done but I think positive activities for young people can be quite ambiguous; what does that mean - is it positive for us, or is it positive for the young people?' (Council senior youth worker 1)

In the Government's youth policy, positive activities were a central idea, provoking debate about the core purpose of youth work being under threat. However, the responses from practitioners did not reflect this sense of there being seismic shift in practice. A strategy of personalising was employed to navigate through the controversial policy goal.

This could be seen more generally in the way that practitioners talked about new policy. The language used by practitioners in the fieldwork interviews did not tend to reflect the language of the national policy documents. Familiar technical words such as ‘universal services’, ‘targeted work’, ‘integrated youth support’ were employed, and there were references to ‘guidance’ and ‘strategies’, but for the most part, explanations of practice were in their own words – for example, the stories introduced earlier in this chapter also represent highly personalised accounts in relation to policy challenges. Chapter 5 explained how a lot of the language of *Aiming High* was aspirational and containing sweeping statements. In contrast, practitioners related their explanations and interpretations to their own experiences: *‘I think..’; ‘I’m inspired by...’; ‘I wouldn’t be able to...’*

Adapting

Another strategy that was evident amongst practitioners was adapting to new circumstances. This was most evident amongst younger youth workers, who tended to be more open to new policy agendas:

‘I was trained in the advent of Connexions, so you know, I’ve always had to work as a youth worker in a time of change and a culture where central government had started to take more notice.’ (Council city wide youth worker 1)

They suggested that as their training had taken place during a time of shifts in youth policy, they were accustomed to policy changes, excited about new opportunities, and the possibility of working more effectively to benefit outcomes for young people. This was particularly evident in discussions around outcomes. Younger workers were more forthright in the need to evidence their work, and talked about how this was possible without there being a ‘threat’ to the distinctive practice of youth work:

'I think we fought too long and hard to say that we were a quality service not to now deliver quality outcomes. We are paid public money, that's what we should now be doing. Long gone are the days when young people could just turn up and go away with youth workers unable to explain what did you do for those three hours?'

(Council city wide youth worker 2)

They described their ability to adapt in terms of being ingenious within the wider policy framework. There were repeated references to not fearing these new approaches:

'So in terms of evidencing, no, you know, I'm not afraid of it. I think there are certain ways of recording it from reports to taking photographs, to engaging. I think we have ways of doing that and I'd be shocked if a worker said that they couldn't record something because they didn't know what to do'. (Council city wide youth worker 1)

Alongside these positions of actively embracing to new policies, other workers described their approach and the way they adapted in a more muted way:

'I think it's more a question of... repackaging things and selling them in such a way. It is that negotiation between what young people want and what we're expected to deliver... sometimes it's a question of negotiation and dealing, brokering... or saying this is significant, we need to do this and we will'. (Council detached youth worker 1)

'Things sort of gradually come in and have an effect... if I was to reread it, I might think, oh yes, we are doing that, or that has helped'. (Council area manager 3)

The youth worker cited above referred specifically to the active processes around accommodating a new policy, recognising that it requires negotiation and dealing with young people and managers. The area manager saw new policies as something that were in the background that could be referred back to further down the line, rather than actively influencing changes from the start.

Some of the responses also demonstrated how new policy could challenge their practice and its effectiveness. For example, with the requirement to engage young people in decision making, one youth worker reflected the fact that this could be easily done on paper, but that it was harder to do meaningfully:

'If I want - I can bring people in to represent, because I work with them and they are easy targets. But for true representation - we need to work at it'. (Council detached youth worker 3)

Other managers adopted a position of seeing new announcements as a positive challenge for the whole area and providing an opportunity to improve – *'I liked the focus on the quality aspect... because it doesn't matter what you're delivering, if it's no good, it's a waste of money'* (Council strategic manager 1)

'Adapting' captures these different strategies, as they all demonstrate ways that practice could be shaped to suit the policy directive, without undermining what practitioners felt was their professional practice. It also helps to show that practitioners moved at different speeds in terms of adapting to change, with some taking more time to accommodate, and others seizing opportunities within the new policy to change services for the better.

Denying

In some of the interview responses, denial was a strategy adopted by many of the workers. Younger workers positioned themselves against colleagues that they saw as protecting an ideological notion of traditional youth work:

'It's a generational thing – I don't see it as a threat... I think there are colleagues who have all... who are still very 1980s and stuck in that, you know, we're actually fighting central government to prove ourselves'. (Council city wide youth worker 1)

Older colleagues were described as *'putting their head in the sand and hoping it goes away'* (Council Operations Manager), or as *'a small minority who simply did not move with the times'* (Head of Youth Services). A voluntary sector manager who had previously worked for the council said:

'It's gone on for years and until the local authority really get to grips with the people that are running, delivering the services in youth service and their willingness to embrace change, then things will stay in the 70s'. (VCS director 4)

It could be argued that it was convenient for managers to be able to point to the reluctance of staff as a reason for changes being hard to implement. However, there was a sense of 'denial' being an accepted understanding of staff in the Service – it was a narrative that circulated between workers and outside the council. It became apparent that it was hard to change the situation - a senior manager who worked with many Youth Services staff said that Youth Services managers were unwilling to challenge these individuals as it was *'too difficult'* (Council strategic manager 2).

One way of describing this situation could be that these were strategies of resistance from staff who were not happy with the changes to youth services. With the IYSS likely to have an impact on individual jobs, it was to be expected that not all staff would be supportive from the outset, and some would need more persuading than others. Whilst senior managers saw this as staff being recalcitrant and refusing to engage, it could also be seen in the context of years of frustration, low morale and the sense that their opinion does not count anyway. During the fieldwork, there were many staff who never responded or turned up to meetings – creating a sense that there were hidden corners to the Service where engagement and lines of accountability were absent. ‘Denial’ most accurately captures these strategies as it appeared to be a case of persistently ignoring that change was underway in a passive way, rather than actively voicing opposition in the way that ‘resistance’ might imply.

In Redtown, practitioners were operating in a context where national policy was being weakly translated into practice, and there were few opportunities for them to come together to share experiences about how to approach new policies with their colleagues. Instead, the strategies they employed demonstrate elements of discretionary techniques, often influenced by their identities as youth workers and views of professional practice. Practitioners ‘muddle through’ taking opportunities where they can (evident in the ‘adapting’ strategies), and in cases that are beyond their control finding ways to cope (as the ‘personalising’ strategies demonstrated). Alongside the three strategies identified in this section, there is a ‘spectrum of positioning’ that can be drawn out from the interview responses, helping to illustrate the range of ways that practitioners respond to new policy.

Table 7.1: Different positions and strategies towards a new policy

Position	Description
Welcome	New opportunity, actively seize upon new ideas
Personalise	Define in relation to own experiences
Adapt	Reviewing and changing existing practice to fit the new agenda
Ignore	Something that is there in the background but does not provoke any change
Denial	Head in the sand – refusal to engage

The strategies of practitioners help to illuminate the complexity of their working practices, and the diversity of meanings and narratives that are involved in making sense of policy at their level. However, some of the more mundane and micro level processes that authors in the interpretive policy studies tradition have found were hard to pinpoint and identify as a researcher without a closer engagement or lengthy shadowing of practitioners in their workplaces. These ‘below the surface’ practices will be discussed in the next chapter in relation to the processes in meetings, but could not be captured through the interview responses.

7.3 THE ROLE OF PRACTITIONERS IN TRANSLATION

This chapter has explored the influences and strategies of practitioners as they accommodate new policy ideas. It has been suggested that youth workers have a specialist role. Their identity as a youth worker is formed in relation to changing policy, and their own perspectives on what working with young people entails, (Rixon, 2007). As a result, they make decisions in their work with young people, or have their own priorities and agendas that may not be in line with government targets and policy (Coles, 2000). However, there is also a risk of over emphasising the role of practitioners in translating policy, and seeing their practices entirely through a lens of being entrepreneurial and active, in spaces where there is always room for local discretion. The analysis in this chapter also revealed a degree of resignation, disagreement and confusion amongst practitioners.

These practices can still be understood through the lens of translation, as they are concerned with interpretation and negotiation around policy, but they do suggest that, at points, there were restrictions on their abilities to improvise and actively re-work policy. This section explores how conscious practitioners were of their role as translators in the case study area. It examines their references and awareness of national policy processes, the ways that information about new policies was communicated, and ultimately how there were disconnects in translation processes at various times during the fieldwork period.

7.3.1 Awareness of national policy

In the interviews, questions were asked that aimed to explore practitioners' reflections on the way that policy moves between central and local government. Some of their comments indicated that practitioners mostly perceived a top down approach from the government:

'There's a big issue, and there always is and always will be around the amount of strategies and policies and guidelines, and they're all competing. And that's about politics. It could be because we've got a change in government or minister or as a response to a major incident. Like Climbie completely changed the focus on safeguarding.... It's a lot for workers to take on.' (Council strategic partnership lead)

This often meant that a decision is made nationally, but by the time it has reached local authorities – *'its relevance isn't as great as it was at the beginning'* or practitioners feel: *'the service stays the same, we're still doing it so what's the difference?'* (Council strategic partnership lead). The speed at which policies were announced could result in practitioners feeling disempowered, unsure of what their focus should be: *'big changes... that haven't bedded in yet... My job's virtually impossible to steer. All I can do is*

read the literature and second guess what might be the right things to do' (Council strategic manager 1). This is an issue that other studies of Youth Services have identified: 'the volume of new guidance and policies, and the rate at which they were introduced, has not allowed sufficient opportunity for consolidation at a local level' (Ofsted, 2010: 9).

There were also criticisms that with so many funding streams, local authorities could end up taking on too much work for fear of losing out:

'If we focus on what we're meant to be doing, and positive activities and looking at our youth centres and our mobile provision and working with young people, then actually we'll tick all the other boxes as well. But the fact you've got us chasing everything under the sun actually dilutes... means we haven't got the time to focus on our core business, the quality is diluted'. (Council Operations Manager)

One of the features of *Aiming High* was that ideas continued to circulate after its initial publication, with ongoing iterations and announcements as the Government sought to define more clearly certain aspects of the agenda. One of these was around the issue of Friday and Saturday night opening, and the challenges that this presents for those responsible for making sense of a policy announcement. Whilst negotiating the practicalities of Friday and Saturday night opening was not necessarily a critical moment for the Youth Services in Redtown, it did show a number of processes taking place around the interpretation of new policies. There were different views about whether it was something that was required, a rejection of a central prescription and a strong feeling that it needed to be young people led. It was also interwoven with a wider debate about the nature of local authority provision and the role of other providers in being distinct and able to adapt their work. For managers, the negotiation was between balancing a requirement with the reality of delivering on the ground.

Case study: Friday and Saturday night opening

Feedback on the implementation of *Aiming High* frequently identified that youth provision was not always being provided at times when young people most needed it. As a solution, the government wanted to see more Friday and Saturday night opening – ‘clearly a time when many young people are at a loose end’ (Jacqui Smith, Home Secretary, Nov 2008 press release). The government announced that 77 local authorities would receive additional funding to extend opening and Redtown was one of these.

The issue of Friday and Saturday night opening was a live one during the time of the fieldwork interviews. It provoked resistance in Redtown and was seen as something that was ‘top down’ from central government:

‘The government has deemed that certain areas have times where crime is higher - for example on Fridays or over weekends. So the government has given the money, and youth clubs have to open at those times. If there is a need - then fine, but the workers are the best placed to decide that - not the government dictating the terms’. (Council area manager 3)

With specific funding allocated to the authority to enable youth centres to be open longer, the scope to ‘resist’ was limited – managers and youth workers had to adapt and implement the policy, even when they were not convinced it was what young people in Redtown wanted:

‘When we have opened sessions up - no one has turned up or they’ve turned up drunk or on drugs and can’t access the services because of their behaviour’. (Council centre based youth worker 3)

There was recognition that the opening times of youth centres needed to be more focused on suiting young people rather than staff, but managers were also clear that they had to think about the family commitment of their workers:

‘The fact that young people tell us they want things on Friday and Saturday nights and also Sunday afternoon – but in terms of the Saturday evenings they want a more grown up time. A more specialised type of offer... We have looked at how we can start covering those Friday and Saturday and Sundays and offering something throughout the week. But recognising that some of our staff have their own families that they need to spend time with. It’s about getting that balance’. (Council Operations Manager)

However, voluntary sector managers felt that the debates over Friday and Saturday night opening pointed to an inflexibility amongst local authority services:

‘Youth centres are closed on a Thursday night and they don’t open again until probably a Monday. I don’t see that changing, I think in the voluntary sector we’re far more, you know, people in the voluntary sector work on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday’. (VCS director 7)

7.3.2 Information flows around new policy

Painter has described how the 'complex geographies of central-local relations contribute to the production of unintended state effects and to state practices that escape the control of the actors who initiated them' (2006: 764). The responses in the interviews capture this point - national policy was largely viewed as a top down process with too many announcements beyond the control of practitioners, resulting in confusion, delays and a lack of relevance on the ground. The way that policy moves between central-local, and local-frontline can disempower practitioners in the process.

The manner in which policy moved from the national and local level also caused issues for the way that new policies and changes were disseminated throughout the local area. Limitations in the flows of information from management level to the frontline were often referred to in the interviews. There was a sense that managers lacked the time on top of their day to day work to absorb the implications of new policy, especially if these were flowing fast from central government: *'it's just another thing that someone's got to read and take on board and think about and brief their team and then deliver'* (Council strategic partnership lead). Because the flow of information was not in place from managers to youth workers, the latter were then not able to update their teams – *'I haven't updated part time staff... I've told them that the Youth Service is changing... but as to what they will be, I haven't got the information myself'* (Council senior youth worker 1).

The impact of the lack of knowledge amongst managers, and the broken information flows to the frontline was that there were differing levels of understandings throughout the Youth Service. Some workers knew more than others on the basis of informal conversations. Others feared that managers in the local authority had something to hide: *you need to brief staff properly – and show them examples so that it*

becomes the norm. When it becomes a threat, people tend to go, I didn't see that (Council senior youth worker 2). It was apparent that change was viewed with suspicion in Redtown – one youth worker commented that he had been through 11 service reviews during his time at the authority.

Despite the criticisms from staff that they were not being kept informed about policy changes and the move to integrated services, there was evidence to suggest that this was also a *perceived* gap. There was a lot of information in the public domain about what the move towards integrated youth services meant, including a section on the website, updates and presentations. A set of briefings on the IYSS had also been arranged for staff and stakeholders. During the fieldwork period, one of these took place at the sports stadium in Redtown largely attended by youth workers. The progress of the IYSS was presented, and the tone was one of creating a dialogue: *'we don't have all the answers yet – we want to work with you to plot where we're going'*.

The criticisms that emerged during the course of the stakeholder briefing suggest that the problem was with *how* information on the IYSS was presented, rather than the content. A lot of the questions raised in the sessions focussed on a lack of clarity over what would happen on the ground and what integration would look like in practice – this was the information that was most important for practitioners. Youth workers felt that the briefings were not a consultation – *'I think the decisions are already made.... The consultations are just a paper exercise'* (Council centre based youth worker 1). As they wanted to know more about what the strategy meant in practice, they felt there was no role for them in developing the specifics:

'I've got a little bit of an idea about how it's coming together, but in terms of really working out what... being involved with the detail of the meat on the bones ... actually, no, I don't.' (Council detached youth worker 2)

The information provided in the stakeholder briefings and project updates were not enough to satisfy the criticisms from staff or to enable them to have an influence on the process. Despite attempts to disseminate the vision for the IYSS, this did not seem to reach frontline workers. The Operations Manager reflected:

'Although they've had a number of presentations around the IYSS and the future and how things are going – if you were to ask them they'd turn around and say they know nothing about it'.

Other studies confirm that this situation was not unique to Redtown. Davies (2010) interviewed local authority workers, and found that many had limited understandings of the changes in youth services. Managers understood what was happening, but that was not being transferred into practice. Senior managers were too overworked to have time to think strategically. Similarly, Ofsted found that staff were not being kept abreast of the changes, and that there were 'poorly developed detailed plans and guidance to help front-line staff understand the practical implications of integrated working at a local level' (2010: 11).

7.3.3 Disconnected translators

The combination of the manner in which *Aiming High* and its subsequent guidance was produced, and the challenges for local authorities in accommodating these rapid new agendas, meant that there was a limit to the role of practitioners as translators. At times, practitioners defined themselves as reluctant transmitters of a central government policy and in a position of being disconnected translators. It was evident from the interview responses that practitioners were conscious of these points of tension. This was particularly evident around their awareness that a new Government was likely in May 2010, and that would mean more changes for Youth Services and their jobs.

Many of the interview responses speculated on the likelihood that a new Government would mean cuts to Youth Services across the country, with investing in young people being seen as a low priority:

'I've got fears about, how Conservatives and public spending tend to go. And they've never gone hand in hand over the years. I know that when it comes to working with young people, money is always cut under a Conservative government'. (Council senior youth worker 2)

The responses had an air of resignation about their future – *'all that (investment) washed away again and we're back to square one'* (Council city wide youth worker 3).

During the early part of 2010, it was apparent that the unsettled national political picture, with a likely change of government, was having an impact on what was happening with the Youth Service in Redtown. As one manager described it: *'we are waiting to see how things pan out... it's been massively disruptive having a change of government'* (Council strategic manager 2). After the May 2010 General Election, the scale of cuts to public spending and the impact on local government was becoming apparent with an emergency budget passed in June 2010. In August 2010, Redtown council had published its savings proposals, and Children's Services would have to make large efficiency savings up between 2011-13. It subsequently became common knowledge that there would be a service review for the Youth Service as part of this process.

The fieldwork preceded this so it is impossible to get a sense of what staff felt about the shape of the Youth Service and the organisational review. However, the interviews that took place in 2010 all contained references to what youth workers felt might be on the horizon. The sense of change, and anxiety about the future was

palpable – and in the context of a new Government, their roles were disconnected from translating and interpreting policy until the new policy framework had been established nationally, and managers locally had absorbed the impact of the budget cuts. This disconnect could be seen as another translation in the uncertainty of policy processes, but it also placed practitioners in a limited environment – where they carried on as they always had done, awaiting the next articulation of national youth policy. It could also be argued that the negative views of many of the respondents about central government policy processes was due to this dynamic – it was an easy target to displace frustrations elsewhere in the face of uncertainty about their own jobs.

In Redtown, details of the Strategic Service Review were published on the council's website in late 2010. Integrated youth services were one of two areas being looked at, to ensure that statutory duties were met, but with services more aligned to commissioning priorities. The review seemed to be a chance to finally move on with implementing the IYSS, but within the context of budget cuts, rather than what had been originally envisaged under *Aiming High*.

7.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has aimed to explore the work of practitioners in translating policy, making visible some of the processes involved in interpreting, understanding and creating new meanings around policy ideas.

In summary, practitioners in Redtown drew on a variety of influences including local knowledge, professional identities as youth workers, and popular narratives and understandings of young people when talking about their practice. The local context they were operating in gave them few opportunities to share learning about their practice and new policies, and alongside this a number of different strategies

emerged for negotiating through the uncertainty – including personalising, adapting and denying. It has already been suggested that there was a ‘weak translation’ of *Aiming High* in the case study area, and in their responses, practitioners were aware of the limits with how policy moves between the national and local level and had some understandings of their role in this process.

Translation is a useful lens to understand the activities of practitioners, the movements around policy, and the way it is constantly being communicated and reproduced – and ensuring that ‘important yet mundane and often missed dynamics’ (Durose, 2011: 982) are included in analysis. However, practitioners were not always actively re-writing policy, or consciously creating something new at their level of practice. Practices of translation are far from uniform, and are not always active and entrepreneurial. They need to be distinguished and the different aspects identified. At times, practitioners were adapting to changes like ‘bricoleurs’, making use of different sources and opportunities (Freeman, 2007). Their practices were also less deliberate, involving what Jenkins has described as ‘the unintended consequences of a range of uncoordinated actions’ (2007: 25). There was an element of subversion and evasion in some of the approaches adopted too (denying). The ability of practitioners to shape policy at their level of practice is not always a positive force - in the case study area, it also involved elements of continuing to work as usual, regardless of a new policy directive.

On the basis of the data from the case study, employing the idea of translation may risk over emphasising the agency of practitioners and their strategies. It is a reminder of Colebatch’s (1998) focus on structured interaction, and the influence of wider patterns of social influences, institutions and patterns that can constrain and limit actions. National policy, with its string of initiatives and funding, can cause disconnects in the translation process, and blockages at the local level. There were also issues with information reaching practitioners, and this was heightened by the

imminent change of Government, leaving the translation of policy at a standstill.

Their roles as translators also stalled at these points.

The next chapter will focus on how managers experienced the translation of policy, and look further into the processes around policy to understand where the tensions were at different levels in the case study area. To conclude here, translation aids an appreciation of influences, strategies and roles of practitioners, and the 'messy reality of policy making' (Griggs et al, 2008). Alongside this, we need to be alert to the moments where the hybridity and flexibility of practice implied in the translation literature can become curtailed and restricted.

Local policy processes

Introduction

Clarke (2005) highlighted in his work on translation the different levels of governance, with new meanings and practices being produced and reinterpreted by those involved at each level. The preceding chapters have analysed the presentation of policy in documents; what happened to aspects of the *Aiming High* agenda in the case study area; and some of the practices that involve translating policy amongst practitioners. The fieldwork for this thesis also involved observing some of the sites where policy intentions were being discussed in the case study area. Meetings are another element of practice involving policy makers and therefore important for understanding what practitioners do (Griggs et al, 2009).

The focus in this chapter is on *where* policy negotiations, deliberations and decisions were taking place and who was involved with these. Meetings at all levels of the organisation were observed, from those taking place in youth centres, to project meetings centrally at the city council (see Appendix 4). However, the analysis here moves from frontline work, to focus on some of the more senior staff involved in strategic meetings around the implementation of the Integrated Youth Support Strategy (IYSS). This could also be seen as the 'meso level' where policy actors are also involved in 'translating government rhetoric into change' (Coleman et al, 2010: 302).

Analysing the meetings and the practices of managers in the case study area adds a further layer of understanding to the policy journey around *Aiming High* and the complexities, details and local situations where policy is enacted (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003). These encounters generated further documents, particularly on the IYSS which are also drawn upon in the analysis in this chapter.

This chapter starts by introducing the meetings that were taking place in Redtown. In order to understand *how* policy happens, the influence of the institutional framework and wider organisational context is also explored, alongside some of the power relations between managers in the local authority. The influence of organisational norms and rituals on translation processes are then examined, developing the ideas introduced in the previous chapter about the points and tensions in policy processes and where the role of policy actors as translators can be restricted.

8.1 DISCUSSING POLICY IN MEETINGS

This section briefly outlines the backdrop to meetings observed in Redtown and what policy was discussed in order to set the context for understanding the negotiations and processes taking place in the meetings. When the fieldwork for this research started, there was considerable activity taking place to develop and take forward the IYSS, although this was still in its early stages. In January 2009, a full time consultant was employed to work on the development of the IYSS; and a structure of meetings, reports and milestones was established under an Integrated Strategy Programme Board.

On paper, the IYSS in Redtown appeared to be coherent and thorough, explaining why it was needed and what steps the project team would take to achieve it. The Project Initiation Document was upfront about the risks to the project, especially given the expectation that local authorities negotiate their own solutions for

integration. The IYSS report recognised that there may be resistance from staff and that careful communication was required around the project to explain its purpose, and to 'develop a shared understanding and common partnership vision'. Mindsets and structures would have to change, within a wider context of different youth agendas in the local area.

Politicians were not involved in the meetings – they had approved the overall vision for the IYSS, and managers in the local authority were now responsible for taking this forward. The IYSS meetings also involved different partners from across the local area, reflecting the drive at the time for more open decision making processes and wider involvement from stakeholders in local government (Stoker, 2004; Downe and Martin, 2006). During the fieldwork, regular access was secured to the 13-19 sub group, the Involving Young People sub group and the Youth Prevention Strategy meetings which all formed part of the overall IYSS project.

One of the main preoccupations for the 13-19 sub group meetings at the beginning of the fieldwork was to address the unequal distribution of positive activities across the city. The Cabinet report was repeatedly delayed as the deployment of current and future funding was worked out. Councillors had insisted that the universal offer to young people had to remain, so that the 'politically sensitive' issue of closing any provision could be avoided. In a 13-19 sub group meeting where the delays were discussed, the consultant described the '*no man's land*' that they were now in, but also reassured the meeting that the report was '*deferred*' rather than having been entirely thrown out and this was an '*extended consolidation stage*'. This was a very sensitive issue for the council as the 'implementation' stage of the IYSS should have been underway by October 2009, when in fact the Cabinet report was not approved until the end of November 2009.

Developing a specification for the youth 'magnet centres' was another key issue in the vision for the IYSS. The centres would be in each neighbourhood, bringing partners in 'both virtually and physically'. In one of the IYSS meetings, the centres were described as needing to *'raise the bar for what all the centres will look like – setting a standard across the city'*. A separate youth magnet centre sub group was established to look at how this would work in practice, and the **'Involving Young People'** sub group was working on a consultation to ensure that the centres reflected what young people wanted.²³

During the fieldwork, a pilot was running in one area of the city. This involved using data from Connexions, the Youth Offending Team and Youth Service to track a cohort of young people at risk in 'real time'. The aim was to understand more clearly the data being received, rather than retrospectively reporting back on targets, with a view to more effectively targeting existing resources in the future. The **Youth Prevention Strategy meetings** under the overall IYSS structure were responsible for monitoring the progress of the pilot.

Meetings in the Youth Services department were also observed, and these had a very different function and purpose. In the case of Senior Management Team (SMT) meetings and the area based meetings with youth workers, the primary focus was addressing operational issues – for example, around health and safety, training, audit reports, the budget for the next year and making sure each area submitted an annual report. The same issues were discussed in each meeting, and decisions tended to require sign off from the Head of Youth Services.

²³ Access to the youth magnet centre sub group was not secured as part of the fieldwork as it was formed after the initial research agreement had been drawn up with the Head of Youth Services, and once he left, there was no one to seek authorisation from. There were no details available publicly on how frequently this met or what decisions it made, so it is possible that it also ceased to function along with many of the other IYSS subgroups.

8.2 THE PROCESSES AND PRACTICES IN MEETINGS

From the meetings observed in Redtown, there were many different processes at work as new policies were discussed and developed into local solutions (in the IYSS meetings) and practitioners continued to navigate through an uncertain and changing context (in the Youth Services meetings). This section considers the interactions between policy actors in Redtown in these meetings as they tried to create consensus and translate a strategy into something that made sense in practice.

Meetings can have their own logic and processes – people gather for a purpose, often to address a particular problem (Freeman, 2008a). The social side of meetings has also been emphasised by Freeman – they involve communication between policy actors in a specific context, and there is an ‘underlying logic and hermeneutics in meetings’ – they are ordered and sequential (ibid.: 5). He suggests that there are rules which influence the interactions in meetings, involving processes of *articulation* (introductions, setting the scene); *perception* (finding common ground); *socialisation* (ad hoc encounters, sharing opinions, building trust); *construction* (clarifying, limiting confusion) and *resolution* (closing the meeting, promising to meet again). Pritzlaff and Nullmeier (2011) have also described the sequences of political practices that can often be seen in meetings and other interactions – *proposal* (a request is directed towards a group or decision making body); *acceptance* (the acts need approval, refusal or another response); and *confirmation* (the mutually binding result of the decision process). Beneath these processes are ‘sub political practices’ that are situated in the day to day activities of meetings and other interactions to establish a common ground. These include:

- *Translation* – turning face to face interactions into a unified use – an official version

- *Repair* – micro interventions during disagreements that put the meeting back on track
- *Re-narration* – telling a different version of the story
- *Self-authorisation* – participants reassuring each other of their authority as decision makers.

They then stress that these are based on the skills and abilities of actors – and the practices are ‘microscopic’ yet of ‘crucial importance to the promotion of political decisions’ (ibid.: 150).

The meetings in Redtown were characterised by the *appearance* of order and formality, and some of the social processes that Freeman (2008a) and Pritzlaff and Nullmeier (2011) have highlighted were evident – although not necessarily in clear sequences. However, in many cases, it was more overt processes that could be seen in the meetings, rather than the more subtle negotiations highlighted in the literature. Beneath the veneer of professionals coming together in a formal scenario, there were tensions, frustrations and dysfunction that often boiled to the surface. Each meeting was a struggle to maintain order and find a way forward. The meetings were dominated by processes of *disagreement* in managing different priorities; *uncertainty* in finding resolutions; *repetition* of well established issues and the *performance* of specific roles by those present.

8.2.1 Disagreement: managing different priorities

Although there was a stated purpose to the meetings (to develop the IYSS), and reasons for different stakeholders to be present (the emphasis on partnership working), managing different priorities and views dominated the 13-19 sub group in particular. In the meetings that I observed, the start generally involved a process of *articulation* with introductions, and setting out the purpose of the meeting. However,

this would quickly descend into clashes and disagreements, and at the stage of accommodating different opinions and building up trust (*construction* and *socialisation*), rather than producing a positive way forward, the meetings would end with the conflict unresolved.

This can be illustrated through the manner in which city council staff related to external stakeholders in the 13-19 sub group meetings. During one particular meeting, representatives from the local Council of Voluntary Youth Services and Connexions were present. The consultant had produced a list of actions they needed to address in order to obtain approval for the IYSS report, but the Head of Change for Children refused to discuss these because she claimed there were people in the room who should not have access to the information as it was not in the public domain. Despite the warm words about partnership working, this did not translate into practice in the meetings and they tended to be dominated by city council staff, with a reluctance to share ownership of the IYSS. There was little agreement in the room about the purpose of the sub group, and organisational protectiveness hampered the ability of those actors who wished to negotiate an agreement. External partners stopped attending these meetings as they were being excluded from aspects of the discussions. In a conversation on a stairwell after one of the meetings, the Operations Manager admitted it was a '*messy process*'.

Another example of these tensions emerged in a Youth Prevention Strategy meeting. Those present were discussing the progress of the pilot, and the fact that this had stalled as Connexions could not provide the Youth Service with data that identified specific young people to work with. This was a stumbling block, jeopardising the success of the project. The Connexions manager at the meeting could not provide answers to this as she needed to refer to a more senior member of her organisation. She also implied it was a safeguarding issue, and that it was not usual for her organisation to share information about young people, which prompted the acting

Head of Youth Services to snap back – ‘*we all know what informed consent is, but this is different*’. This resonates with a situation that Lowndes and Sullivan (2004) described in their work where meetings involving partners and organisations mean that everyone in the room has a different mandate. This means that it can be increasingly hard to balance the perspectives of those present, or make decisions without having to refer back to other people not present.

Through these tense exchanges around the presence of external partners, it felt as though the local authority staff were united in their frustrations and this gave them a tacit shared understanding in the meetings. The fault lay elsewhere – and was beyond their control, as these issues could not be resolved in the meetings themselves. This also served to mask their own internal disagreements and lack of progress.

8.2.2 Uncertain resolutions

Despite the disorder witnessed in some of the meetings, there was also evidence of *construction* with clarifying steps within more productive discussions to try and address the problem and find a *resolution*, with those present in the meeting employing sub-political interventions such as *repair* to put the meeting back on track during disagreements. However, the outcomes were often uncertain and based on a fragile consensus.

An example of this could be seen in the Involving Young People meeting where middle managers from the Youth Service were discussing how to take forward the consultation with young people with the external consultant. He made various observations and assertions to refocus the meeting, relating the immediate concerns of the meeting to a wider policy, political and pragmatic context. For example, when the recurring problem of transport costs arose, the strategic participation lead was

impatient for something to happen now, and felt that there should be a campaign led by young people on the issue. In contrast, the consultant's focus was on *'needing political agreement, then a business case, then funding in order to implement it'*. When there was an extended discussion complaining about the challenges of getting young people involved with youth activities, the consultant reminded the meeting that the issues from the consultation were in line with what the Government already expected from local authorities.

These subtle actions helped to keep the meeting on track, and although the Youth Services staff did not agree with the consultant's positions, they were able to agree a tentative way forward. The consultant also ensured that the next steps were broken down into four concrete things to ask young people in the consultation, and despite the resistance in the room was adamant that they had to agree how to undertake this work and establish what was feasible within their resources. His language was often formal – *'what does success look like? How it is operationalised'*, which led to the strategic participation lead teasing him for using Prince2 phrases – *'I had to go on that course in order to understand what half of the city council were talking about'*.²⁴ The banter in this meeting helped to ease some of the tensions and frustrations, and refocus the meeting. However, despite securing a commitment to continue with the consultation, the overall impression was that there was still a lot of instability around the purpose of the meeting and its success relied on the middle managers having agreed to do the work required. When the consultant left, the Involving Young People sub group never met again, and the consultation work was abandoned.

The conditional nature of the resolutions reached in meetings was also demonstrated through the 13-19 sub group. The sequences of proposal, acceptance and confirmation identified by Pritzlaff and Nullmeier (2011) could be seen. On one level, the need to resolve the issue of resource allocations in Youth Services across the

²⁴ Prince2 is a process based approach for project management and it is common for local authority managers to be certified in Prince2 methodologies.

city was common ground that all participants were aware of and during the period of the fieldwork, a solution was reached. The '*proposal*' could be seen as the need to secure agreement on the Cabinet report. '*Acceptance*' of this was achieved as politicians approved the plan. There was '*confirmation*' when in one of the sub group meetings, the Head of Youth Services described the compromise they had reached. As it was politically unacceptable to move core funding, or redistribute funds across the city, a '*middle ground*' had been found where every ward would gain in funding, but some more than others. This was '*mutually binding*' in that it secured the consensus needed in order to move forward.

However, this confirmation came from one individual – the Head of Youth Services - who brought the news to the meeting, with it having been negotiated and agreed elsewhere. When the Head of Youth Services was absent, irritable exchanges between the consultant and other senior officers dominated. Despite the attempts of the consultant to find solutions, other participants were not willing to participate in this. The meetings ended abruptly with the sense of '*self-authorisation*' and their authority as decision makers lacking. It became apparent that the smooth running of the meeting relied on the presence of the Head of Youth Services - both to provide authority, but also information and knowledgeable updates. The resolution in the meeting was highly provisional, and reliant on the right people being in the room.

8.2.3 Repeating issues

In the fieldwork, the way issues could stagnate and be endlessly repeated in meetings emerged quite clearly in the internal Youth Services meetings, suggesting that the practices to keep meetings moving forward were absent.

The meetings followed certain formalities with introductions and agendas to discuss. However, in contrast with the IYSS meetings which took place in impersonal board

rooms, these Youth Services meetings were around desks in people's offices with cups of tea or over lunch in a youth centre. As a result of more informal settings, the meetings were conversational in tone, demonstrating the way that the physical and spatial settings help shape the sociality of the meeting encounter ('*socialisation*'). In this context, the SMT meetings seemed to provide a safe space to complain about the scale of the challenges managers faced, without the need to necessarily generate concrete actions.

The Operations Manager was supposed to feedback on progress on the IYSS from the sub group meetings, but as this process stalled, she was not empowered with any particular privileged information or awareness of what had been taking place to decide the future of the service. The lack of progress with the IYSS and the operational issues this was causing were also re-articulated at area based meetings. The area managers (who attended SMT) presented updates to staff in their areas, but also had nothing new to pass on in terms of information. The work of *construction* in these meetings involved staff collectively making sense of their situation so they were able to continue with their day to day priorities. Although the senior youth worker chairing the meetings was critical of the '*flawed systems*' and the lack of feedback that workers got at area level, these meetings were quite pragmatic in tone – in the face of budget cuts, his call was for staff in their area to '*be creative about it and go for it*'.

SMT meetings also fulfilled a particular role around story telling – something Freeman (2008a) identified in the role of *perception* in meetings, where personal experiences are related as these are situations that participants easily identify with. This was often from the Operations Manager, and repeated some of the personal narratives she had included during my interviews with her. One of her big issues was around salaries, and the fact that youth workers get '*£6.80 an hour to work with the most challenging young people in Redtown, and they could get £10 for stacking shelves*'.

Training was another problem and she again emphasised '*I came through the grassroots – senior member, part time youth worker, then did the degree*'. The stories in the meetings helped to create a sense of the shared understanding between the managers – again drawing on the distinct professional identity of a youth worker, and anecdotes they were familiar with to contextualise the current policy challenges they faced. This could also be interpreted as establishing credentials through constructing a particular identity in the meeting which had credibility with those present. These meetings did not require resolutions and instead the work of *construction* amongst those present was to resort to well rehearsed observations and discussions.

8.2.4 The meeting as a performance

The view of meetings being explored here emphasises the interactions in meetings, with social processes taking place between those present as they seek to address the problem collectively. In the meetings in the case study area, these actions could be interpreted as performances that policy actors were engaged in (whether conscious or unconscious) that were sometimes barriers to the overall functioning of the meeting itself.

For example, in the Involving Young People meetings, the tone was more pragmatically focussed, and the group had a more hands on role as it consisted of middle management and one junior member of staff. The overall approach was dialogical with those present collectively discussing the consultation results, in order to decide what steps to take next. However, staff barely concealed their lack of respect for the external consultant, which was evident in the gentle teasing outlined earlier in this section. They questioned why they were having to take on extra work:

'What isn't my role, is to say, yes I'll do that piece of work or consultation, and I'll talk to these young people, as much as I'd like doing these things – that's why we have a workforce that can do that.' (Council strategic participation lead)

They were influenced in their performances by the knowledge that the consultant would soon be gone – *'that's the thing with having a consultant come from outside the local authority'* – and therefore felt freer to be obstructive without having to face consequences.

One of the issues with all the groups was that membership tended to change between meetings. This meant that basic understandings, such as the purpose of the meeting, had to be endlessly reasserted and explained afresh. The knowledge of each person present varied considerably depending on their level of involvement, interest and engagement with the wider IYSS context. This created the space for staff to be impatient and at times, disruptive in the meetings. The participants also did not appear to be particularly keen to be present at the meetings. The effect of this was heightened by the fact that many of the same members of staff featured in the different sub groups resulting in the same performances arising in different settings.

There appeared to be an underlying code in the meetings between those participating. There was a tacit understanding that a front was being maintained about what the meetings were achieving, with most people in the room were aware of the lack of progress being made. Not all participants were part of this performance – the consultant stood out for his commitment to setting priorities and keeping the focus on the IYSS implementation plan – yet this was easier given his role as an 'outsider'. The acting Head of Youth Services also played a role of proposing solutions - at the first meeting that he attended, where he was keen to stress that a *'reassurance message'* needed to get out to staff that the strategy was still going

forward. However, this could also be seen as maintaining the front - with no one openly admitting the extent to which Redtown was behind at this point in their IYSS.

8.2.5 The role of meetings

Freeman (2008a) suggests that meetings take place in the 'language of translation'. This entails coming up with new terms to express what has been identified in the meeting. Reports are written, adapted, redrafted and each shift is a translation. The knowledge that comes from the meeting is its output, and this is a dialogic process initiating another series of communications. The expectation was that the meetings observed in the case study area would show these new articulations more clearly. Lendvai and Stubbs (2007) talked about the 'noise' present in the translation processes around policy, and it was this sense of disruption seemed to encapsulate the meetings in Redtown

The IYSS meetings outlined above did involve discussions on developing local policy solutions – although these were tightly defined aspects of the IYSS agenda, devolved to the sub groups to investigate further and take forward. There was a large body of documents on the IYSS available publicly, showing the continuing translation and different iterations of the strategy. These documents could be seen as another set of translations coming from the meetings. In these IYSS documents, the local version of policy appeared to be actively negotiated through each update and report that the meetings received and monitored.

However, the activity around new policy in these documents masks that fact that in the meetings themselves, deliberations and decision making was largely absent. Despite the structure of meetings on paper, the involvement of senior members of staff, and the groups being tasked with developing service provision around the IYSS, the meetings were largely powerless. At times this was due to external factors,

such as the delays with the Cabinet report, but there was an overriding sense of going through the motions of 'doing policy' in the meetings, without much commitment or enthusiasm.

Over the course of the fieldwork, meetings tended to be erratic and cancelled at the last minute, even when they had been published on the council's website. By the end, the IYSS meetings that I had been attending stopped happening – either due to the consultant leaving, or the reality of the budget constraints and the imminent service review. When the meetings were cancelled, one of the participants commented:

'I think that tells you the picture. I think there were certain people more keen than others, and when those people are no longer here... I think a lot of the meetings produce more meetings... and they don't necessarily produce any action'.

This leads to the question of what the purpose of the meetings was, and what did they achieve? Rather than a dialogical process leading to different iterations of policy, the meetings were largely a performance. Participants maybe recognised their limited role in influencing and translating policy and that this was taking place elsewhere – in the documents, but also in decision being made outside the meetings. Whilst it was hard to obtain an accurate impression of what was happening between meetings, discussions between and within departments were evidently taking place, with 'fixing' strategies and agreements in conversations outside of the meetings.

8.3 ORGANISATIONS, POWER AND POLICY ACTORS

The frustrations and lack of progress in the meetings, were not the only reason why implementing the IYSS was problematic in Redtown. The wider organisational context also influenced the translation processes around the IYSS. At one point in my research diary, I wrote: *Is this PhD really about ineffectiveness in local government?* - a comment based on witnessing the frustrations of workers in many of the meetings. The focus on organisational processes had not been the original intention in the fieldwork, but these tensions and issues crept into many of the discussions and observations, and could not be ignored.

In Chapter 2 the idea of organisational culture was introduced, and its influence on behaviour and events (Smircich, 1983; Alvesson, 2002; Schein, 2004). The local authority case study contained elements of a 'role culture' (Handy, 1993). Those participating in the meetings were following local authority procedures and processes, within a wider context of a large organisation, with a degree of formality, and clearly defined expectations. Martin (2002) draws attention to the 'differentiation' perspective, where there is consensus present throughout an organisation, but also subcultures within this leading to different interpretations of cultural manifestations. This idea is also of relevance to the case study location as different professional groupings operate within the organisation, with their own distinct perspectives. Youth workers and their managers could be seen as a subculture within the organisation, and as the previous chapter explained, local institutional frames of reference have an influence on practitioners, and the enactment of policy (eg: Coleman et al, 2010).

Barnes et al (2004) also drew attention to the power of professional, political and organisational norms that influence policy translation. This helps to explain why those acting in similar contexts, make different decisions. These norms and

relationships are worthy of exploration here as it helps to explain the restrictive context that many middle and senior managers were operating in. As the previous chapter suggested, practitioners at the frontline were often engaged in their own strategies for making sense of a new policy, but experienced issues with the way that information about new policies was disseminated in the organisation. At the next level up in the organisation, which has been the focus of this chapter, the influences of organisational and operational issues on the behaviour of policy actors were just as profound. This section examines the local authority context, and the power relations between the key policy actors, as these both influenced the ways in which they interpreted and translated policy.

8.3.1 Local authority bureaucracy

Although the boundaries of the case study stretched outside the local authority itself, examining the ways in which new policies were interpreted, discussed and developed, inevitably involved the majority of sites being within the local authority as an organisation. Despite the wider context of more diffuse governance processes outside the boundaries of the state (Newman, 2002) and moves to encourage the greater involvement of citizens in decision making (Downe and Martin, 2006), elements of the local authority as a cumbersome and inflexible structure were visible in Redtown in the operation of the Youth Service.

At one SMT meeting, the Operations Manager needed to have authorisation from the interim Head of Youth Services on the next allocation of PAYP money so that youth centres could start planning their holiday activities. He also had the bids for the YOF on his desk and had been querying some of the proposals. This involved the Operations Manager having to *'write another paper'* to stress that they were young people led, and that the delays were denying young people access to the funding. The effect of this then trickled down into the area based meetings, where staff

realised they were unable to plan their activities without confirmation of funding allocations from above. These decision making processes appeared lengthy and slow moving. Pierre (2009) has suggested that in new governance arrangements bureaucracy has not opened up to allow for lower level discretion in decision making, and this was certainly evident in the case study area.

As the previous chapter highlighted, workers who were involved with external organisations commented on their ability to be more creative and move more quickly than the city council. One voluntary sector manager who had previously worked at the city council described her experiences of initiating a project in the council:

'If I was reading something similar from a youth service perspective in the local authority I would be going, wow, that's interesting. We can do that. Now, I need to write a report for my senior managers and the next senior management meeting isn't for a month. The agenda is probably full. I write the report. It gets changed in the process. They can't decide what to do with it. It might need to go to cabinet or full council. In a year's time actually what's happened is we'll have lots of discussions about it and achieve nothing because it's not on anybody's radar anymore. It's gone. It's history. We've missed the boat.' (VCS director 4)

However, there was also one particular example of where middle managers in the Youth Services department had managed to circumvent some of the slow council processes to hold a successful campaign to encourage first time voters to take part in the General Election and local elections in May 2010. It was funded by three voluntary organisations and the city council and the project was completed from start to finish in 10 days. As the youth worker commented *'I didn't have to write a paper that goes to ten different people'* (Council city wide youth worker 1). This suggests that the commonplace interpretation of local authorities can be used as an excuse, when in fact, if individual workers have the motivation they can work differently

and outside of the organisational understandings and boundaries. This was a rare exception, and at the time of the fieldwork it was the *'write a paper'* understanding that featured most prominently when talking about getting things done in the council.

Alongside this the role of local authorities as the provider of services was something that was being contested. The overall impression of the meetings and practices in the Youth Services department was that these were local authority led. Outside of the local authority, one of the voluntary sector interviewees questioned whether the council should be delivering services at all, and that staff needed to shift to understand the role of local authorities as *'being the people who look after their citizens to being a facilitator, a conduit – all those other things that being a good partner is'* (VCS director 7). Some managers were aware of these changing roles:

'We might not be the best fit in this folks. I believe strongly in local authority youth services, and I would not want to see commission everything out. I do think it's that mixed economy and there is a role for voluntary, private and statutory service working together'. (Council Operations Manager)

Understandings of the changing context of local authorities around what they should provide and how, was beginning to feature in the minds of some managers. However, there was no consensus over this at the time of the fieldwork. The impact of this was that the space managers were operating in felt constrained and subject to bureaucratic blockages and uncertainty about the role of the local state.

8.3.2 Power relations and politics

Power relations in the local authority also need to be considered as part of the organisational context. In theory, local authorities have clear power lines of

accountability, and individuals who wield overt power within the organisation – such as politicians, the Chief Executive and Corporate Directors. These actors can be seen as elites who set agendas, filter issues and exert their influence through policy preferences (Lukes, 2005).

The Cabinet member was not present at any of the IYSS meetings, although her influence could be felt. The presence of politicians was overt through the need to seek their approval, and their ability to stall over decision making and cause delays, even if they were not directly present in operational meetings. The most visible issue was over the balance of funding across the city which held up the initial approval of the IYSS paper. Reflecting back on this process, the Head of Youth Services said:

'It took a year of going nowhere from October 2008-October 2009 largely because it was rewritten so many times. At one point it was 30 pages. Then it ended up with seven pages... what we really needed was approval to proceed and get on with it. It was a nightmare'.

Politicians were at times a barrier, as well as acting as enablers in setting the overall political vision for the city.

The views of politicians towards the Youth Services department were also far from straightforward. The Cabinet member for Children's Services felt that officers were to blame for the IYSS stalling:

'There's some issues maybe about the competency but they're certainly not confident and didn't have the patience to understand that this is how it would look in practice and I don't... I just don't think they really have been able to grasp that nettle'.

The Cabinet member saw the departure of key staff from the Youth Services as an opportunity '*for a fresh start*', suggesting a lack of power and influence on her part to influence the way they worked.

Within the local authority, complex power struggles and relationships were at work between different policy actors. The visible decision making processes in the organisation were often infused with conflicts of interest (Lukes, 2005). Some of the power dynamics lay in relationships built up over time between staff operating in a climate of mistrust and disillusionment. The combination of these nuanced processes, and the central (though absent) operation of power, often created situations where policy actors – and in particular, managers - were again restricted in what they could achieve as the next section will explore.

8.3.3 Weakened managerial spaces

One of the effects of the power processes and organisational context in the case study area, was that managers were often frozen out of policy making. Munro et al (2008) described managers in local authorities as 'dual intermediaries', with an active role in shaping policy, rather than the more old-fashioned view that public officials merely carry out the wishes of politicians. NPM reforms also stressed the enhanced role of managers, freed from daily interference from politicians. In Redtown, many of the managers were operating in a space where they had the potential to be 'institutional entrepreneurs' (ibid.: 69), especially if the IYSS had developed in the way it had been set out on paper. Instead, many of the senior managers were caught between the locus of power (with politicians and corporate directors) and the dispersed practices of frontline staff, with little freedom to act.

The effect of the centralisation of power with certain key figures in the local authority was visible in the case study. Senior managers in the Youth Service could not make

decisions without higher approval, and the chain of command was very hierarchical. As we have already seen, decision making processes were slow. The Head of Youth Services complained that the Corporate Director and Chief Executive required constant updates, and left managers with little freedom to operate. In the past, he felt there had been strong support from politicians for Youth Services in Redtown, and he had experienced good relationships with the Cabinet member for Children's Services – *'the youth service always got protected. I shared with her what was going on and what the issues were – good or bad. I've always said be upfront – and tell them'*. He then described the current situation, where the power dynamics had shifted, and he was no longer allowed to present papers to councillors:

'You get a situation – and it happened several times with the IYSS paper – that the Corporate Director would take the paper – and miss points about what was in it. So if members questioned you, you couldn't answer it, so it got knocked back. All it needed was to have me sitting there waiting, she could call me up (which previous Corporate Directors did) and I could answer the questions. I'd developed an expertise in that over many years. But it's as if you can't be trusted with that anymore'.

As the analysis from the fieldwork has explained, a frequent complaint in the Youth Services department was that managers were weak, and lacked knowledge about policy changes, diminishing their power amongst frontline staff. This was not necessarily always an issue to do with capacity at that level of management – area managers suffered in terms of being kept up to date with what was happening. One of the area managers commented in a SMT meeting:

'We're supposed to be senior managers and we don't know what is happening. It looks bad when people in the field ask us if a review is happening. All we can say is yes, but we don't know where, when and who...' (Council area manager, 2)

Tichelar and Watts (2000) found in their research that local authority managers had informal powerful roles, centralised around the Chief Executive, with bargaining taking place between the centre and service departments. This may have been the case at Corporate Director level within the council, but amongst senior managers, the lack of power, and impression of being under siege from all sides was the most prominent one. As a result their roles in the policy process and defining a local vision for Redtown were largely redundant.

8.3.4 Key absences

Another factor in the shifting power relations in the local authority at the time of the fieldwork was the absence of managers at crucial points in the policy process. Earlier in this chapter, the pivotal role of the Head of Youth Services was visible in the meetings, as he had the authority to drive forward the implementation of the IYSS. Despite the lack of power he felt in regard to his seniors, the Head of Youth Services was described as a mysteriously, powerful figure by some who had worked with him - *'the prince of darkness'* (VCS manager 1), and as having *'built up an empire'* (VCS freelance consultant 2) within the council.

At the end of 2009, the Head of Youth Services went on sick leave and half way through 2010 resigned from the council all together. A power gap then emerged, with no one able to assume his role in steering policy through the different relations in the local authority. There was a lack of clarity at first over how long the Head of Youth Services would be absent for. This meant that the Operations Manager took on an increased workload in the Youth Services Department, but without the power to drive through any decisions at a strategic level.

The Head of the Youth Offending Service was then brought into cover the Head of Youth Services job (alongside his existing role). The interim nature of this post meant

he was operating from an uncertain position – *'he has to try to set the arena for the next couple of months'* (Council Operations Manager) - but with everyone aware that it might not be a permanent arrangement. Managers had no information either:

'We haven't had a Youth Service head for five months, but if you ask the Operations Manager, when are we going to get one? ... Either she doesn't know or she's not saying... it seems to be too big and too important an issue to be treated the way it is'.
(Council area manager 2)

The Corporate Director for the Department then retired, and the interim Head of Youth Services (and the Youth Offending Service) was promoted to that post in May 2010. This left a further leadership gap at senior level for the Youth Services department. By the end of the fieldwork, the Head of Change for Children who has been leading on the ISH process, had *'agreed in principle to take some lead responsibility for the IYS. But she's got a day job apart from what she's been asked to do'* (Council former Head of Youth Services).

The original Head of Youth Services had managed to negotiate the power dynamics (despite his frustrations), developing these delicate processes over time. When he left, the reshuffling of senior posts meant that there was no obvious person to lead the IYSS and the focus was lost - with no powerful figure to advocate the policy on behalf of the Youth Services department.

8.3.5 External presences: the Consultant

The fragility of power relations in the local authority was also evident in the resistance to outsiders being involved in setting a forward strategy for the Youth Service. The consultant was employed following the NYA report on how to take forward an IYSS in Redtown, and in theory should have had a pivotal role alongside

senior managers in ensuring that the policy could be implemented. When the Head of Youth Services was still in post, it was apparent that they worked well together, despite the criticisms from some staff that emerged in the meetings. However, the consultant's contract was only for nine months, and he left around the same time that the Head of Youth Services went on sick leave. The meetings around the IYSS then stopped.

One of the senior managers at the council reflected on the consultant's involvement:

'He was given a task, but didn't have the mandate to do it, and I think if they were going to bring him to do, if you like, a hatchet job on Connexions and analysis of the youth service, then they should have briefed him up front as to that's what the job was. I think he arrived thinking that the job was, everybody was seeing it from the same view, and they weren't. So he was given an impossible task'. (Council strategic manager 1)

As a result, the consultant was treated with mistrust and the presence of an external person was not welcome. This was partly because the work from the NYA that preceded the consultant's appointment had created an atmosphere of suspicion that the Youth Service department was going to be cut, as staff believed the report contained *'horrible things'* (Head of Youth Services). During the IYSS process, instead of being able to work with staff in the local authority to develop the project, the consultant was caught in a web of competing power struggles and unable to progress his work.

By the end of the fieldwork, when members of staff knew that another review of the Youth Services would be happening, the SMT talked about bringing in another consultant to oversee this process. There was a sense here of needing someone external to make recommendations on controversial issues, as it was more palatable

to attribute unpopular decisions to someone not employed by the council. Ultimately, the IYSS was a requirement and should not have rested on two individuals promoting it (the Head of Youth Services and consultant). Once they had both gone, it was apparent how staff below them did not have the capacity or authority to continue the project. The speed at which the programme of work unravelled upon their departures signals how fragile the arrangements were around interpreting the new policy.

There is one example in particular that highlights how the operational, management, staffing and political influences could combine to produce a standstill – the MyPlace project. This example reveals problems with the way that central government funds projects, and issues with the capacity of local authorities to manage big capital projects. However, what is of interest is how the negotiations and interactions around the MyPlace project in Redtown were chaotic and inconsistent, with an evident lack of support from staff. As the impetus lay with a few key individuals, when they left, there was a struggle to persuade other members of staff to lead – both in terms of their interest and capacity.

Case study: MyPlace

At the time of the fieldwork, the planning was underway for the MyPlace youth hub in the city centre and a business plan was being submitted. In meetings it was described as *'world class'* and *'fantastic'*.

However, problems were emerging over the management, and these were never resolved. The Head of Youth Services was in charge initially, with dedicated project managers from the council. After his departure, the management of the project then passed to a middle manager from the Change for Children team, who only had one day a week for the project. This coincided with the General Election and uncertainty over whether the Government would still fund Myplace, so the project stalled. Finally one of the area managers from Youth Services was appointed on secondment – a year and a half after the initial Business Plan.

There was a lack of ownership over the management of the project. Meanwhile, crucial issues such as agreeing the running costs and who would meet these; engaging external partners in the building; and tackling physical problems with the premises were not being dealt with.

The MyPlace project was also subject to various political influences. In Redtown, the commitment to build a youth hub was a local manifesto pledge from the Labour

administration. It was described as a '*vanity project*' from the Head of Youth Services and Leader of the Council. There was political pressure to open the building before the May elections in 2011, but this was eventually abandoned as a timescale.

The combination of a specific national funding stream, and local political determination meant that the project was difficult to steer: *When you get a big capital project like that, it comes with lots of strings attached and agendas, political agendas, political legacy building from politicians* (Freelance consultant 1).

Others also highlighted the restricted context they were operating in:

'With big projects... it's rushed through very quickly, we don't know until the last minute. There is an issue with the political angle for a city centre youth base - because a lot of the MyPlace bids for other local authorities has been locality based - there's a lot of politics around that'. (Council strategic participation lead).

8.4 A BROKEN SERVICE

Colebatch has highlighted how in contrast with the authoritative choice view of policy in the literature, practitioners 'give another account of the process, one which stresses that there are a wide range of participants, with diverse agendas and values, who are thrown together in various ways to produce ambiguous and provisional outcomes' (2007: 2). This is a powerful description that can be applied to the case study context – with policy actors working at seemingly different agendas; meetings pulling participants together with no consensus and an overall lack of progress in implementing the policy task at hand – the IYSS.

An issue that was raised repeatedly in interviews and meetings was that there was a gap in terms of the strategic direction of the Youth Service, and '*getting the basics right*' was a challenge. One of the area managers expressed this as:

'There's no Youth Services Business Plan. We don't know what drives us. It's frustrating as an Area Manager as I have no information either. We also have no budget and it's already June. Youth centres are getting bills... then there's the risk

then of overspend and we get criticised at the end of the year. We need someone to argue our case'. (Council area manger 4)

Alongside this, in several interviews, the idea of a 'broken service' was introduced, suggesting that there were issues embedded in the organisation, hampering its overall effectiveness. Alvesson (2002) has examined the role of the taken for granted ideas in organisations, that bind and sustain activities. This is implied to be a positive force to help foster shared understandings and cohesiveness. However, in Redtown, the taken for granted idea rested on this idea of a 'broken service', synonymous with being backward looking and unable to move with the times. This was portrayed as being deep rooted and having spread quickly even among newer staff:

'A huge amount of resentment. It feels like there's some cancer or something in the service. And it feels bizarre... I'm surprised, or in one way disappointed – some of our staff are relatively new, not long out of university, and they seem to very quickly have fallen into the way of why do we need to do this...' (Council operations manager)

Coleman et al highlighted how locally developed discourses act as a frame of reference, and organisations that had been through many reorganisations were 'shaped by the schemata derived from earlier reorganisations' (2010: 303). Handy (1993) has also stressed how organisational culture is influenced by past events and the present climate. A 'broken service' can also be seen in this context – the Youth Service department had been through many previous reviews that were beyond their control, and the respondents knew this was on the horizon. There was an element of fatigue around new policy, with the wave of policy initiatives under *Aiming High* still being worked through, as a new government came to power and the policy context was set to change again.

In the case study, there was an interplay between professional cultures and the prevailing organisational culture which had consequences for the behaviour of individuals and groups involved in bringing in a new policy. Bloor and Dawson have described how past stories, myths and experiences become recreated and shared in organisations, then providing 'a framework for interpreting situations and deciding present and future actions' (1994: 277). At times, the fiercely guarded professional identity of being a youth worker was most prominent, shaping how practitioners were interpreting the changes around them. The influence of an organisational culture that was, at times, large and unwieldy was also hugely significant, as it created a context that meant change and routines were hard to shift (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006). However, it is important to bear in mind that the fieldwork involved engagement with only small aspects of the wider organisation, and given the close engagement with practitioners in the interviews, it is perhaps understandable why the impact of professional culture and identity appeared most prominent.

It is also the case that operational and organisational problems were not unique to Redtown. Davies' research into youth services across the country described how 'successful policy implementation depends on effective communication between managers and practitioners on the rationale behind the policy and its likely impact on practice' (2010: 20). Milbourne found that in children's services, the 'top down aspects of planning and change processes, poor communications, conduct of meetings and documentation' (2009: 84) caused gaps between intentions and practice that were not reconciled.

8.5 CONCLUSION

Newman (2009) described the idea of 'policy as process' as the different iterations, deliberations and negotiations around policy, and that accessing these is a long and hard process for the researcher. The translation literature has emphasised the different levels at which policy is re-written, and this chapter has focussed on the strategic level within the case study area, examining the processes between policy actors who had responsibility for implementing the IYSS.

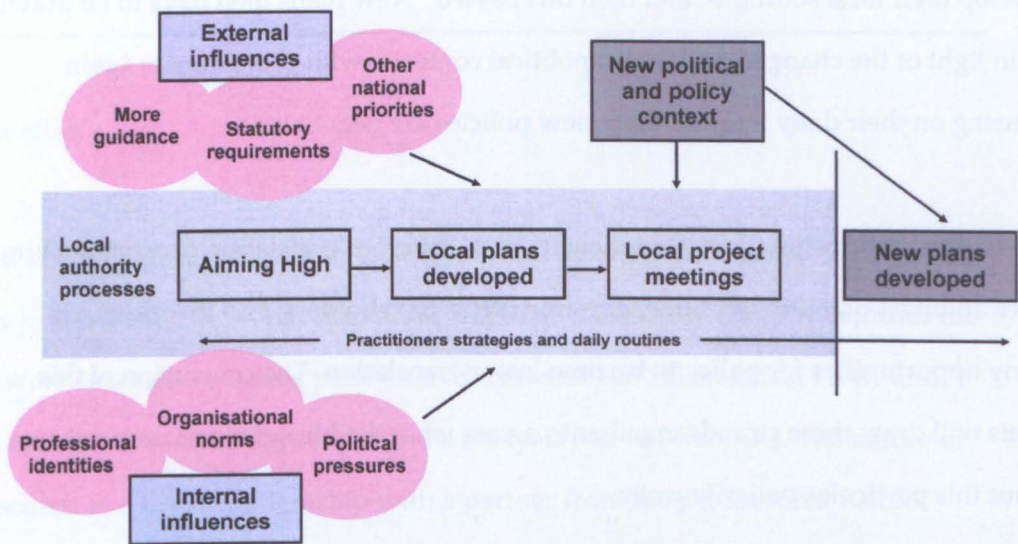
An appreciation of organisational culture and its influence is a useful analytical tool alongside translation, and in this chapter, it has helped to provide a context for the work of translation around *Aiming High* and to understand what underpinned the interactions in the local authority. It encourages a focus on the way people make sense of organisational life, and how these interpretations form 'patterns of clarity, inconsistency and ambiguity that can be used to characterise understandings of working lives' (Martin, 2002: 5). In

From the analysis in the case study area, policy actors at the strategic level had a limited role in translating new policy. This was due to a combination of factors that have been explored, including the slow moving organisational context and the absence of key members of staff at crucial points. However, the biggest issue did seem to be that the meetings set up to take forward the IYSS were largely ineffective in developing and implementing policy, with policy work and decisions taking place somewhere else between the meetings. There was also a disconnect between a strategy that made sense at strategic level, and an understanding of that strategy that was shared by practitioners.

The examination of the processes amongst middle managers leads to questions about where the policy journey breaks down. Colebatch (1998) stated that policy involves

the work of many hands, and in Redtown, it was often hard to pinpoint exactly where policy happens. Figure 8.1 encapsulates what the policy journey looked like in Redtown:

Figure 8.1: The policy journey in the case study area



As this shows, national policy was published which suggests a new way of doing something. There was broad agreement with the principles of what was being proposed, and plans were made locally on how to achieve this. The policy journey around *Aiming High* in Redtown then became fraught with difficulty. The organisational tensions show the power of existing institutional practices, routines and norms to determine how new policy is responded to and enacted (Barnes et al, 2004; Pope et al, 2006). These local processes affected the ability of the Youth Service to carry out the change required, whilst external influences of more guidance, requirements and new initiatives continued to be developed. At the same time, practitioners drew on particular influences and developed their own strategies for accommodating change, and also continued to operate as they have done before in the face of uncertainty.

Translation has helped to appreciate that policy is never complete, yet this chapter (and figure 8.1 above) also shows how policy came to a halt in the negotiations around the IYSS. As previous chapters have suggested, this was also closely related to political changes – but it suggests that there is an (incomplete) end point to some policies. *Aiming High* had its time, there was a window for local authorities to develop their local solutions, and then this passed. New plans then have to be drawn up in light of the changed policy and political context – with practitioners again focusing on their daily work as these new policies are negotiated.

The fieldwork data has illustrated the variety of different translation processes taking place amongst practitioners, managers and other stakeholders, and that there are many opportunities for policy to become lost in translation. The conclusion of this thesis will draw these strands together to assess what the idea of translation tells us about this particular policy journey.

9

Conclusion

Introduction

The understanding of policy as an incomplete and disorderly process has guided the inquiry in this thesis. It set out to explore whether 'translation' usefully captures the policy work that takes place as policy moves between central and local levels and into practice. A focus and approach for the analysis had to be chosen. The nature of this research as a CASE studentship with a partner from the professional field of youth work (the NYA) structured the choices to be made about what the study would focus on: youth policy; a specific document called *Aiming High*; the policy goal of positive activities; and a close examination of how these were being interpreted in one geographical area. This provided a practical and potentially illuminating approach to analyse what happens in between and around a national policy goal and enactment at a local level.

The analysis was structured around three broad aspects of policy work – text, practices and processes – to see the different levels where interactions and negotiations take place. The inquiry into these sites of translations was given further definition by four research themes – positive activities; partnership working; engaging young people in decision making and measuring outcomes. This conclusion aims to draw together some of the main findings from previous chapters, to examine whether the idea of policy translation is useful for understanding the policy process, and how it can be applied to understand the policy relationship

between central and local government more generally. Finally, this chapter will briefly reflect on the research process itself, and suggest areas for future research.

9.1 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The warnings in the literature about the gaps in our knowledge around the work of practitioners in context became a central issue during the research. Designing a methodology to capture these processes was identified as a particular challenge. To genuinely shadow practitioners and observe their interactions whilst actively employed in their daily tasks would have involved a level of immersion that would not have been practical as a doctoral researcher. As a result, a lot of the fieldwork data relied on interviews with practitioners giving *accounts* of how they viewed policy, and on observing meetings over a set period of time where policy was being discussed, rather than a direct observation of the daily routines of work. The idea of 'being an insider' and studying practice is far from straightforward – Wagenaar and Cook (2003) challenge whether it is possible to be sensitive to the every day aspects of problem setting in the work environment. The ability to observe often instinctive and taken for granted micro processes amongst practitioners was therefore limited, which restricted the ability to develop these ideas further.

By the end of the fieldwork, I felt that at points the main research themes had not always served their purpose in uncovering translation processes at work, and that closer consideration should have been given to what I could have expected to see happening to identify translation processes taking place. Inevitably some of these were in daily, routine practices that even practitioners themselves might not recognise or be able to talk about. There is also the possibility in some of the interviews that respondents did not want to admit to the extent to which they diverged in their opinions and practices from what was expected by government or the local authority.

One of the main things that I had to appreciate was that there were many other negotiations and interpretations happening elsewhere beyond the gaze of the researcher - there are silences in this account emerging from the places I was not allowed to go, or the people who did not come forward to speak, or in the day to day interactions where decisions were being made informally. This research is a case study, and these are reflections at a very specific moment, representing a very particular set of concerns that were prominent at that time around a certain strand of youth policy. This does place limits on the understandings of practice that are presented in this thesis, and it is important to be clear about this incompleteness.

9.2 THE CONTRIBUTION OF TRANSLATION TO UNDERSTANDING THE POLICY PROCESS

The concept of translation has been applied to policy in order to understand a move away from ideas around transmission, dissemination, stability and unproblematic implementation in policy, to instead stress networks, negotiations, fluidity and reflexivity around practice:

‘It is through the bending and the blending of different positions and perspectives that we are enabled to see ‘policy’ as a constant move between the formal and the informal, the institutionalised and unofficial practices, the paperwork and ‘the reality’. (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007: 183)

Alongside this impetus to think afresh about implementation (Clarke, 2005), the idea of translation helps to appreciate that:

- Policy is always in use and highly mobile
- Policy processes are uncertain and disorderly

- Policies are altered through different translations across various sites
- Practice is central to the process

One of the main aims of this thesis is to examine whether translation is a useful concept through which to understand the policy process. This research has shown, through a detailed investigation of one particular case, where translations happen in and around policy as it moves between different levels, and what roles different policy actors play in this process. The case study highlighted that translation can be a powerful tool of analysis for understanding policy texts and the instability of processes in local policy making.

9.2.1 Policy documents and translations

The analysis of *Aiming High* as a policy document, subsequent guidance and local policy documents helped to show how, from the moment it is committed to paper, policy is layered with different interpretations and meanings, and further translations are produced. *Aiming High* provided guidance for the role of local authorities in providing a youth offer, without specifying exactly what integrated services should look like. Documents were produced at a local level in Redtown outlining what needed to be done and who needed to be involved, as local policy actors attempted to translate the policy ideas into a locally understood plan.

However, there are further processes at work beyond the dynamic of central to local interpretation. The analysis of *Aiming High* revealed that there were many policy ideas that had been recycled from elsewhere, and articulated Government values were renewed and restated. The document was 'of its time', constructing the importance of positive activities, drawing on certain understandings of young people, and social policy themes that were Labour Government priorities. Multiple projects were concealed in the text (Newman, 2007), as it sought to manage tensions

around outcomes and youth work practice. Ideas around authorship, the use of evidence and the debates in the wider youth sector around *Aiming High* were also interrogated to understand the ongoing nature of the work around documents (Freeman, 2006b).

The meanings in policy texts are inherently imprecise and open to multiple interpretations. When a policy text is produced, it is translated by those who have responsibility for carrying out its actions, and those who comment on and interpret it more generally. It leads to the development of further documents, guidance, plans and the movement of policy continues far beyond its original articulation. Translation helps to capture this re-working and movement of policy in words.

9.2.2 Translations in practice

The centrality of practice (Freeman et al, 2011) is a key point in the translation approach to policy studies – practitioners and local policy makers are interpreters and originators of policy (Newman, 2009). In a context where national policy can be ‘relatively non-specific in detail’ (Coleman et al, 2010: 289), the local translation processes taking place in a complex field of diverse meanings and narratives, involve re-working, reproducing and rearticulating policy at this level. Understanding practice is crucial to appreciating what influences how policy happens in a local area.

The interviews and meeting observations in Redtown showed the complexity of making the vision in *Aiming High* a reality for young people. *Aiming High* (and the youth policy direction that preceded it) was far from being a perfectly formed set of ideas that could easily be translated into practice. As the interpretive policy literature has stressed, behind the practices that people see, there is work of construction taking place. This is a primarily social and communicative process, but

there are also individual interpretations, influences, professional identities and local knowledge that practitioners bring to the process.

As Chapter 7 examined, the practices in the case study area involved adopting strategies and positions towards policy, and these processes were diverse as practitioners navigated through their daily work. Frontline staff did not believe they had much say over what happened to new policies locally, and in the changing policy context, they personalised aspects of policy ideas, adapted their practice to fit new requirements and some denied the existence of change and new agendas all together. These translations around a new youth policy agenda often meant continuing practices that had been long established, consistent with their training as youth workers. The idea of translation helps to capture the extent to which practitioners are involved in making sense of policy at a local level and negotiating a way of being in relation to a new policy goal – policy is inert until it is brought into being at the level of practice.

9.2.3 Unstable translation processes

One of the criticisms of approaches that have focussed on the work of practitioners is that this can cause researchers to overlook what goes on between policy and the frontline (Newman, 2009), and looking at process as well as practice helped to address this in the analysis. Translation helps to explain the unstable and incomplete processes in the strategic level of the local authority – where the influence of existing institutional frameworks, operational concerns and power struggles had an impact on the interpretation and enactment of policy. Many policy actors are involved in the policy journey from text into practice, making it increasingly hard to pinpoint where policy actually happens. Alongside this, national changes caused ‘unstable translations’ around how the IYSS was being taken forward.

As Chapter 8 explored, the policy journey of *Aiming High* in Redtown was uneven, and influenced by local disturbances and disconnects. The ineffectiveness of meetings in translating policy was apparent with processes of disagreement, uncertain resolutions, the repetition of issues and performances hampering progress. Key policy actors were engaged in complex power relationships over new policy, and when the two main people driving forward an IYSS in Redtown left, policy development unravelled.

Through the lens of translation, it is possible to see that policy is still in use and ongoing, but with the understanding that disruptions constrained the abilities of policy actors to negotiate around policy. The points where the capacity of practitioners to rework and rewrite policy are restricted (due to local and national factors) also need to be taken into account. A combination of the following issues contributed to the unstable and weakened translation of policy in the case study area:

- no shared understanding of the local vision for change in Redtown and little opportunity for learning
- some managers were excluded from key processes and perceived as weak
- professional identities were seen by some to be challenged by the new policy
- changes and absences of senior managers which led to an inconsistency in approach to the IYSS
- fatigue around new policy initiatives
- powerful pre-existing local understandings of a broken service

It is in the complex space between actions and organisational processes at a local level where policy seems most likely to be lost in translation. There is no single crisis

point or moment where this happens – these were processes over time that intersected to cause the incomplete policy journey.

Practitioners were also aware in some of the interviews how their roles as translators could be impeded by the flurry of initiatives and guidance from central government, and the length of time it took for the local authority to interpret this. This meant that by the time something had been implemented locally, national policy had already moved on to the next thing. By the end of the fieldwork period, discussions around the future of the Youth Service as a whole had taken over from the IYSS, as managers worked on a new reconfigured service in light of the public spending cuts. This preceded a new national youth policy announcement, but a new translation of policy was already in train. At these points of ‘overlapping translations’, the policy interpretations around *Aiming High* were edged out and ‘lost’, as new articulations of policy were beginning.

9.3 TRANSLATION ISSUES

The persuasiveness of translation as an idea in understanding policy processes in this case study can be summarised as:

- encapsulating the incomplete and ongoing nature of policy processes – particularly in texts
- a frame for understanding the activities of practitioners who are involved in positioning and making sense of policy on a daily basis
- understanding the different sites, and mediations of the work of policy at different levels
- appreciating where policy processes can become unstable, lost and overlapping at both the national and local level

There are a few unresolved issues with translation as an idea for understanding policy processes. Freeman (2009) indicated that too many claims can be made for translation as an idea, and urged some caution to analysts when applying it to policy studies. One of the core ideas is that translation helps to make visible the work of practitioners, and there is no doubt that translation work was happening, as practitioners and managers talked in the interviews about how they approached policy, and adapted to it, or rejected certain elements. Yet the vast majority of these accounts in the data involved practitioners talking about their own work, rather than how they mediate between different positions. Translation was not something that respondents consciously talked about. These accounts were then subject to my interpretations as a researcher – a further translation. This suggests an issue with surfacing translation, and witnessing it taking place as a researcher. From the data in this thesis, it was hard to find micro processes between people in the field, negotiating over small details, or rebadging policy. This is not to say this work was absent entirely – but as already indicated – different methodological tools would have been required to appreciate these less obvious practices.

There are also some limits in how far translation progresses an understanding of practice. On its own, translation does not fully capture the different practices that were observed in the case study location as practitioners made sense of new policy. There are a variety of terms that have been employed in this thesis to capture the strategies involved in practice – with modifying, mediating, adapting, denying being just a few of the interpretations provided for the work of practitioners. When understanding meetings, it was necessary draw on the literature that explained the social processes and sub-political practices that policy actors were engaged in (even if these were not always visible in my own data). This indicates the importance of grounding translation in an understanding of practice in general.

At points, Freeman's (2009) idea of a 'new semantic object' in translation processes was also hard to see. This involves understanding translation as a less active and creative process at points – local frames of reference could at times be a powerful pull to stay stagnant, and to find ways to cope in difficult, shifting contexts. Are these still translations? This points to either needing to define translation in the policy process more closely, or be comfortable with its inherent mobility and employ it as a metaphor to capture a range of ideas in the interpretive policy field. This tension has been resolved in this thesis by seeing translation as a wider term, supplemented by many other ideas that help to understand how policy moves from words to the frontline, and the iterations and negotiations around policy amongst policy actors. This research has not just been about translation, but also improving an understanding of practice, which suggests the importance of continuing efforts in this area – with or without translation as the lens.

The central idea in translation is that there are new twists and turns, and new meanings and interpretations, in the policy process – which suggests there is no end point. The sense of incompleteness and the indeterminate nature of the negotiations around policy can make it hard to form conclusions that could help to improve the policy making process. We have understood more closely what practitioners do, but how can this help policy actors in the future? Despite the word of caution above, the next section attempts to provide some pointers.

9.4 GENERAL LESSONS ABOUT THE POLICY RELATIONSHIP

The experiences in Redtown around *Aiming High* lead to the question of whether this 'weak' translation of national policy amongst local authorities is the norm? For the reasons outlined in Chapter 3, I would be wary of generalising from the findings in Redtown. However, the challenges of making policy happen is something that has continued to receive considerable attention from academics and commentators in the

political world throughout the course of this thesis – particularly in light of the change of government in May 2010. The Institute for Government's work around 'making policy better' (Hallsworth and Rutter, 2011) has recently argued that policy can be ill considered and hasty, and that that has been a failure in Whitehall to understand the impact of policy on the behaviour of people.

However, the focus in these reports has been on what happens in Whitehall and how policy can be better designed at this level. The contribution that my research can make to this debate is illuminating the processes that happen once policy has been stated, and how it is made and remade in practice. It helps to recognise that policy is not just a text, and that its outcomes can change during the implementation process. Policy does not happen in distinct stages – and it unwinds in often unpredictable ways.

The main lesson that could be drawn is that national policy makers need to acknowledge that translations of policy happen at a local level and ensure these are accounted for when they describe policy goals from the centre. This would entail being aware of how meaning in policy changes from the original text as it is reworked in practice, and being alert to the role of practitioners in the strategies and discretionary approaches in practice. The untidiness of the process should be more explicitly referenced, rather than producing policy texts that imply that coherent actions will follow. In addition, if we are to have a more inclusive policy process, more in touch with the reality of implementing central government ideas and strategies, then voices from local government need to be included in the policy development process from the outset.

There are findings from the case study that point towards wider problems with the policy relationship between central and local government. The local authority in the case study struggled to keep up with the pace of policy announcements. If a new

policy requires reorganising a service area, then there can be a significant time lapse between the policy document and legislation and changes on the ground. This delay can be further complicated by changes in political control nationally, where efforts are then superseded by a new set of announcements, within a different overall framework and vision. Meanwhile, practitioners carried on with their daily roles whilst attempts are made to adopt and embed a local version of the new policy. As the responses revealed, this causes conflicts and tensions for those in the local area.

The central and local government relationship had a number of fault lines running through it – local authorities frequently request more freedom to innovate at a local level and shape services to best suit their communities. This was a refrain throughout the Labour years, at a time when local government was also subjected to increasing numbers of targets. In Redtown, there were some complaints that the lack of guidance (for example in *Aiming High* around integration) and that central government could have provided more of a steer. Rather than the culture being of innovation at a local level, there is instead confusion and inconsistency.

The Coalition Government that came into power in 2010, after 13 years of a Labour Government, has stated that more prescription is not the solution and has a renewed focus on local level solutions and freeing local government from central bureaucracy and control. However this is currently being accompanied by imposing rigid spending cuts which reduce the amount of flexibility locally. Policy has the ability to be simultaneously enabling and restrictive for local government. These dynamics ultimately hinder the movement of policy between the two levels. There are currently moves to codify the relationship between central and local government (LGA, 2012) and attention within this needs to be given to understanding at what points policy can become lost in translation, and what level of local variation is acceptable within each new central government policy.

The organisational challenges that emerged during the fieldwork in Redtown also contain some important messages for local government. Local authorities need to have officer capacity to engage with national agendas and to develop a clear strategic vision for these locally. The challenge is to create time and space for managers to reflect, absorb, plan and communicate change. Where there are information gaps and delays, managers need to feel empowered to be creative and develop their own visions – adding their own translations to policy. Alongside this, there must be an understanding of the importance of bringing staff along with them on policy journeys and change, and providing opportunities for views from the ground to be fed back into local policy processes. Daniels et al (2007) describe this as organisations needing to support flexible, responsive action navigating through tensions, structures, and rules.

This research provides some indicators of what might make a ‘good policy journey’, or at least reduce the chance for policy to be ‘lost in translation’ along the way, as table 9.1 summarises.

Table 9.1: Desirable elements in a policy journey

National	Local
Clear vision and explanation of aims	Political backing
Inclusive policy development process	Officer freedom to innovate
Involvement and testing with frontline staff	Consistency amongst staff (eg low turnover with key personnel)
Balance between guidance and prescription	Staff empowered to input into strategy
Timescales set out	Regular feedback and support
Local discretion within clear parameters	Meetings with specific outcomes

However, this has to come with a cautionary note of being an ideal set of requirements, and translation has helped to understand that the policy process might resist simplification. It has contributed to a greater understanding of what people do

in their daily jobs and how they relate to policy, but it is harder to conclude what is required for making the policy process better.

9.5 REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

When undertaking social research, it is the hope of every researcher that the work will have a positive impact for the individuals, community or organisation that have been studied. However, the changing political and policy context was a challenge throughout the management of this thesis. As the introduction to this thesis explained, these external political factors meant the focus of the research altered as it went along. The research was initially established as a partnership with the National Youth Agency, and one of the aims being to produce findings that were relevant to the youth policy field and practitioners. Chapter 3 outlined how, due to changes within the NYA itself, by end of the research the involvement of the partner organisation had ceased entirely. As a result, the findings from this research around the challenges of interpreting *Aiming High* are less relevant for youth work practitioners as they would have been if the policy has been retained.

During the fieldwork period, I built up productive relationships with staff in the case study and was able to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality, which undoubtedly helped in terms of securing access to meetings, and the accounts in some of the interviews. An omission from this research is the opportunity to feedback findings to those staff who participated. As the fieldwork finished, the strategic review of the Youth Service started in Redtown and many of the original contacts moved on. The Youth Service in Redtown is now very different as a result of this review, so feeding back on the empirical findings in this study would be of less interest for practitioners there in understanding the processes around their IYSS. The frustrations and issues covered in Chapter 8 were tested at the time with the former Head of Youth Services (who had left the council when he was interviewed by me), and an interview with

one of the authors of the external consultant's report into integrated services that was commissioned by the council in 2007. This was a way of checking some of the assumptions and interpretations about the organisational and operational difficulties that I was witnessing.

In addition, towards the end of the fieldwork personal contacts were used to discuss the changes taking place in youth policy. This involved interviewing a senior manager in a national voluntary sector body, and a Head of Youth Services in a London local authority. At the same time, the Mindsets and Mechanisms report (Oldfield and Merton, 2011), and Ofsted's (2010) report were published which documented some of the different forms that integration was taking across the country. Although this was far from ideal, the combination of these discussions and reports, did at least provide the opportunity to think about whether the challenges around *Aiming High* and beyond in Redtown were also being experienced elsewhere in the gaps between policy at a national level.

On a further reflexive note, my identity (alongside a PhD researcher) as a local authority councillor in Hackney and a long standing Labour activist have also had an impact at times on the research process. This research contains my interpretation of *Aiming High*, and I have to acknowledge my own bias in this reading, as someone potentially more prone to be supportive of Labour Government agendas. Outside of this research, I have been involved directly in seeing the impact of public spending cuts on local services. There is an understanding in this research that comes from my experiences as a councillor, which at times has been useful in knowing the language and workings of local government in depth, but has also been inherently political and angry at the impact that some of the policy decisions in 2011 and 2012 have had on the lives of young people. This interest and commitment does not end with this thesis.

9.6 A BRIEF ASIDE ON WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

As the changing political and policy context has been a constant feature throughout this research, it seems appropriate to reflect on what happened after *Aiming High*, particularly given the extent to which the changing national picture had an impact on the end of the fieldwork. A new government brings a new framework and vision for policy – and youth policy was not immune from this. Many of the programmes and initiatives that came out of *Aiming High* were stopped abruptly (Hughes, 2011), and the Coalition Government published *Positive for Youth* (DfE, 2011) – a statement of its youth policy – at the end of 2011.

With a new government, a reasonable expectation could have been that *Aiming High* would be entirely lost in the translations between the two. However, there are many familiar themes and narratives in *Positive for Youth* that are consistent with Labour's youth policy – particularly around securing young people's active involvement in services and the need to work with partners to provide a youth offer. There is also a firm statement on helping the most disadvantaged, and the statutory duty to provide positive activities remains, but the policy statement brushes over defining this too closely.

The more notable shifts in emphasis are around collaboration between public, private and voluntary sectors, and developing a market for youth provision that does not rest solely with the public sector (whereas in *Aiming High* local authorities had a role at the centre of these partnerships). The Children's Minister Tim Loughton MP had signalled early on that he did not view the role of local authorities in youth services favourably (Higgs, 2010). In *Positive for Youth* the importance of other sectors providing services was a consistent theme, and in the early months of the Coalition Government, some local authorities were already reported as outsourcing their youth services entirely (Watson, 2010).

New policies also provoke new reactions. As the fieldwork interviews revealed, there was a fragile acceptance around positive activities by many practitioners. Despite positive activities still featuring in *Positive for Youth*, they were openly criticised, and it could be argued that post *Aiming High*, the need to be supportive of the Government's agenda disappeared. They were dismissed as 'vacuous' in one journal article, and having had the damaging effect of trapping youth work between 'the views of government seeking more organised programmes and achievable outcomes, and those who prefer to emphasise process' (McKee, 2011: 17).

Another consistent theme throughout this thesis has been the arguments around the role and purpose of youth work as a distinct contribution in services for young people. With the steer from the Coalition Government that early intervention and specialist services needed to be prioritised fears around the end of 'genuinely person-centred youth work' (Davies, 2011: 103) were paramount. One of the effects of this has been that the debate around evidencing youth work has developed considerably. In a time of reduced public finances, there was recognition that – 'youth work needs to make a convincing case for proper investment and show, in figures, not just in stories, how individuals, communities and society benefit' (Wylie, 2010: 4). The Young Foundation has taken forward this work to develop an outcomes framework for the youth sector 'to support understanding and measurement of the connections between intrinsic personal and social development outcomes and longer-term extrinsic outcomes' (Young Foundation, 2012: 4). It could be argued that progress on this at times thorny issue is at last being made – but there are still some who are resistant. National youth bodies have been criticised for becoming 'the handmaidens of whoever will drop a coin in their begging bowl' (Jeffs, 2011: 7).

This brief postscript to the case study reveals how familiar policy themes are rearticulated in a new political context. Core ideas remain (partnership), with

different emphases (the local state as a commissioner), and challenging problems (measuring outcomes) are reworked again at national and local level. There is the opportunity to learn from previous mistakes, and try to improve but within a new overall framework. These new articulations will undoubtedly present familiar challenges for practitioners – with changes being required in their practices. These translations are for future research to consider.

9.7 FURTHER RESEARCH

One of the drivers for this research was to closely observe the practice of policy and to be immersed in a setting where policy work is happening. I have explained some of the methodological limitations in carrying this type of research out in practice, but would suggest that future research along these lines would be fruitful to develop more comprehensive understandings of the worlds of practitioners. At a time of budget cuts and fraught internal processes, it is likely that public organisations might be more resistant to opening themselves up for researchers – something that was becoming increasingly apparent towards the end of my research.

However, it could be argued that it is then even more important to find ways to access the world of practitioners to understand the impact on their practice during a period where the role of the local state is being redefined. There is scope to develop an improved methodology for researching in organisations, that reaches the micro processes I could not see, and the parts in the process at strategic level that senior staff may not want exposed. As others have pointed out, it may not be possible for researchers to see the exact points where policy happens. Navigating through some of these tensions is important for developing improved methodologies for ethnographic accounts of practice.

The boundaries of the local state are being redrawn under the Coalition Government. An interesting starting point for future research could be to think about these translations of policy in terms of where the new spaces and sites of policy making are. With less prescription from the centre, can local government be more active and innovative in the policy making process, building on an understanding of what role translation plays at this level? Recent studies (Hallsworth and Rutter, 2011) have not focussed on the relationship between the centre and the local in policy making terms. As localism is being recast yet again, these ideas are worthy of more detailed exploration.

Bibliography

- Adamson, J., Poultney, J. & Stutz, A. (2011) *Increasing the engagement of young people in positive activities*, London: Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services.
- Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities* (2007) London: HM Treasury and Department for Children, Schools and Families.
- Ainley, P., Barnes, T. & Momen, A. (2002) 'Making Connexions: a case study in contemporary social policy', *Critical Social Policy*, 22 (2) pp. 376-388.
- Aldred, R. (2007) 'Closed policy networks, broken chains of communication and the stories behind an 'entrepreneurial policy': the case of NHS Local Improvement Finance Trust', *Critical Social Policy*, 27 (1) pp. 139-151.
- Aldred, R. (2008) 'Ethical and Political Issues in Contemporary Research Relationships', *Sociology*, 42 (5) pp. 887-903.
- Ali, S., Campbell, K., Branley D. & James, R. (1998) 'Politics, identities and research', in Seale, C. (ed) *Researching Society and Culture*, London: Sage.
- Alvesson, M. (2002) *Understanding Organisational Change*, London: Sage.
- Amin, A. (2005) 'Local community on trial', *Economy and Society*, 34 (4) pp. 612-633.
- Amin, A. & Roberts, J. (2008) 'Knowing in action: beyond communities of practice', *Research Policy*, 37 (2), pp. 353-369.
- Atkinson, P. & Coffey, A. (1997) 'Analysing Documentary Realities', in Silverman, D. (ed) *Qualitative Research: theory, method and practice* London: Sage.
- Atkinson P. & Hammersley, M. (1998) 'Ethnography and Participant Observation', in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (eds) *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, London: Sage.
- Audit Commission (1998) *A fruitful partnership – effective partnership working*, London: Audit Commission.
- Audit Commission (2008) *Are we there yet? Improving governance and resource management in children's trusts*, London: Audit Commission.
- Audit Commission (2009) *Tired of Hanging Around*, London: Audit Commission.
- Bache, I. & Catney, P. (2008) 'Embryonic Associationalism: New Labour and Urban Governance', *Public Administration*, 86 (2) pp. 411-428.
- Back, L. & Solomos, J. (1993) 'Doing Research, Writing and Politics: the dilemmas of political intervention in research on racism', *Economy & Society*, 22 (2) pp. 179-199.
- Bagnoli, A. (2009) 'Beyond the standard interview: the use of graphic elicitation and arts based methods', *Qualitative research*, 9 pp. 547-570

- Bagnoli, A. & Clark, A. (2010) 'Focus Groups with young people: a participatory approach to research planning', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13 (1) pp. 101-119.
- Balls, E. (2006) *Children and Young People Review: Written Ministerial statement*, 5th July [Accessed online at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending_review/spend_csr07/reviews/cyp_review/cypreview_index.cfm]
- Barnes, M., Newman, J. & Sullivan, H. (2004) 'Power, Participation and Political renewal: Theoretical perspectives on public participation under New Labour in Britain', *Social Politics*, 11 (2) pp. 267-279.
- Barrett, S. (2006) 'Implementation studies: time for a revival', in Budd, L., Charlesworth, J. & Paton, R. (eds) *Making Policy Happen*, Oxford: Routledge.
- Barton, D. & Tusting, K. (2005) *Beyond Communities of Practice: Language, power and social context*, Cambridge: CUP.
- Beebeejaun, Y., Durose, C., Rees, J. & Richardson, L. (2012) 'Lost in Translation? Understanding the Genesis of Policy: the example of the 'Big Society' (forthcoming)
- Bell, E. & Bryman, A. (2007) 'The Ethics of Management Research: an exploratory content analysis', *British Journal of Management*, (18) pp. 63-77.
- Bennett, A. (2007a) 'Analysis: Policy- Brown's plan starts to take shape', *Children and Young People Now*, 11th July.
- Bennett, A. (2007b) 'Analysis: Policy- Ten Year Youth Strategy – a blueprint for the next decade', *Children and Young People Now*, 1st August.
- Beresford, P. (2006) 'Service Users, Social policy and the future of welfare', in Budd, L., Charlesworth, J. & Paton, R. (eds) *Making Policy Happen*, Oxford: Routledge.
- Bevir, M. & Rhodes, R. (2006) *Governance Stories*, London: Routledge.
- Billett, S. (1998) 'Constructing Vocational Knowledge: situations and other sources', *Journal of Education and Work*, 11 (3) pp. 255-73.
- Blacke, F. (2007) 'Progressive Universalism', *Children and Young People Now*, 28th November.
- Bloor, G. & Dawson, P. (1994) 'Understanding Professional Culture in Organisational Context', *Organisation Studies*, 15 (2) pp. 275-295.
- Bloor, M., Frankland, J., Thomas, M. & Robson K. (2001) *Focus Groups in Social Research*, London: Sage.
- Blumer, M (1988) 'Some reflections upon research in organisations', in Bryman, A (ed) *Doing Research in Organisations*, Routledge: London.
- Blumer, M., Coates, E. & Dominian, L. (2007) 'Evidence Based Policy making', in Bochel, H. & Duncan, S. (eds) *Making Policy in Theory and Practice*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Boaz, A. (2003) 'Evidence-based policy and practice', in Bovaird, T. & Löffler, E. (eds) *Public Management and Governance*, London: Routledge.

- Bochel, H. & Duncan, S. (2007)** 'Introduction', in Bochel, H. and Duncan, S. (eds) *Making Policy in Theory and Practice*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Bochel, C. & Evans A. (2007)** 'Inclusive Policy Making', in Bochel, H. & Duncan, S. (eds) *Making Policy in Theory and Practice*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996)** 'Understanding', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 13 (2) pp. 17-37.
- Bovaird, T. (2007)** 'Beyond Engagement and Participation: User and Community Coproduction of Public Services', *Public Administration Review*, (Sept/Oct) pp. 846-860.
- Bovaird, T. & Loffler, E. (2003)** 'The changing context of public policy', in Bovaird, T. & Loffler, E. (eds) *Public Management and Governance*, London: Routledge.
- Bradford, S. (2005)** 'Modernising Youth Work: from the universal to the particular and back again', in Harrison, R. & Wise, C. (eds) *Working with Young People*, London: Sage.
- Brown, G. (2007)** *Speech To Labour Party Conference* [Accessed online at: http://labs.labour.org.uk/swc/200059/brown_speech]
- Brown, J. & Duguid, P. (1996)** 'The Social Life of Documents', *First Monday* 1 (1)
- Bryman, A. (1988)** 'Inside accounts and social research in organisations', in Bryman, A (ed) *Doing Research in Organisations*, Routledge: London.
- Bryman, A. (2004)** *Social Research Methods* (2nd ed), Oxford: OUP.
- Bryman, A & Cassell, C (2006)** 'The researcher interview: a reflexive perspective', *Qualitative Research in Organisations and Management*, 1 (1) pp. 41-55.
- Byrne, B (2004)** 'Qualitative interviewing' in Seale, C (ed) (2nd ed) *Researching Society and Culture*, London: Sage
- Buchanan, D., Boddy, D. & McCalman, J. (1988)** 'Getting in, getting on getting out and getting back', in Bryman, A. (ed) *Doing Research in Organisations*, Routledge: London.
- Budd, L., Charlesworth, J. & Paton, R. (eds) (2006)** *Making Policy Happen*, Oxford: Routledge.
- Bullock, H., Mountford, J. & Stanley, R. (2001)** *Better Policy-Making*, London: Centre for Management and Policy Studies.
- Cabinet Office (1999a)** *Modernising Government White Paper*, London: Cabinet Office.
- Cabinet Office (1999b)** *Professional Policy Making for the Twenty First Century*, London: Cabinet Office.
- Cabinet Office (2008a)** *Excellence and Fairness: Achieving World class public services*, London: Cabinet Office.
- Cabinet Office (2008b)** *Aspiration and Attainment amongst young people in deprived communities: analysis and discussion paper*, London: Social Exclusion Task Force.

Calvey, D. (2008) 'The art and politics of covert research: Doing 'situated ethics' in the field', *Sociology*, 42 (5) pp. 905-918.

Chambers, E. (2000) 'Applied Ethnography', in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed), Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Chandiramani, R. (2007a) 'Tom Wylie: There's much still to do', *Children and Young people Now*, 20th June.

Chandiramani, R. (2007b) 'A Fitting send off for the NYA's leader', *Children and Young People Now*, 1st August.

Charmaz, K. (2008) 'Grounded Theory in the 21st Century: Applications for Advancing Social Justice Studies', in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (3rd ed), Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Cheek, J. (2008) 'The Practice and Politics of Funding Qualitative Research', in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (3rd ed), California: Sage.

Civil Renewal Unit (2005) *Together we can*, London: Home Office.

Clark, A. (2006) *Working Paper: Anonymising Research Data*, Manchester: ESRC National Centre for Research Methods.

Clarke, J. (2005) 'What's culture got to do with it? Deconstructing welfare, state and nation', *Paper for Anthropological approaches to studying welfare Research seminar University of Athens*, November.

Clarke, J., Marashi, M. and Harrison, R. (2001) 'Using CAQDAS to Formulate Facts about Flexibility in Further Education', *Paper for Learning and Skills Research 5th Annual Conference*, January.

Clarke, J. & Newman, J. (2007) 'What's in a Name? New Labour's citizen consumers and the remaking of public services', *Cultural Studies*, 21 (4-5) pp. 738-757.

Coffey, A. & Atkinson, P. (1996) *Making Sense of Qualitative Data*, London: Sage.

Cohen, P. (1997) *Rethinking the Youth Question*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Colebatch, H. (1998) *Policy*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Colebatch, H. (2007) 'The Work of policy, the work of analysis', *Paper for the Conference on Interpretive Policy Analysis Amsterdam*, June.

Coleman, A., Checkland, K., Harrison, S. & Hiroeh, U. (2010) 'Local histories and local sensemaking: a case of policy implementation in the English National Health Service', *Policy and Politics*, 38 (2) pp. 289-306.

Coleman, J. (1992) 'The Nature of Adolescence', in Coleman, J. & Warren-Adamson, C. (eds) *Youth Policy in the 1990s: the way forward*, London: Routledge.

Coles, B. (2000) *Joined up Youth research, policy and practice: a new agenda for change*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.

Compton, R. & Jones, G. (1988) 'Researching White collar organisations', in Bryman, A. (ed) *Doing Research in Organisations*, Routledge: London.

- Cooper, G. (2008)** 'Conceptualising social life', in Gilbert, N. *Researching Social Life* (3rd ed), London: Sage.
- Crawford, A. (2003)** 'Contractual Governance of deviant behaviour', *Journal of Law and Society*, 30 (4) pp. 479-505.
- Cunliffe, A. (2003)** 'Reflexive Inquiry in Organisational Research: Questions and Possibilities', *Human Relations*, 56 (8) pp. 983-1003.
- Czarniawska, B. & Joerges, B. (1996)** 'Travels of Ideas', in Czarniawska, B. & Sevón, G. (eds) *Translating Organisational Change*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.
- Czarniawska, B. (2008)** 'Organising: how to study it and how to write about it', *Qualitative Research in Organisations and Management*, 3 (1) pp. 4-20.
- Daly, G. & Davis, H. (2002)** 'Partnerships for local governance: citizens, communities and accountability', in Glendinning, C., Powell, M. & Rummery, K. (eds) *Partnerships, New Labour and The Governance of welfare*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Daniels, H., Leadbetter, J., & Warmington, P. (2007)** 'Learning in and for multi-agency working', *Oxford Review of Education*, 33 (4) pp. 521-538.
- Davies, B. (1999)** *From Thatcherism to New Labour A History of the Youth Service in England Volume 2*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.
- Davies, B. (2005)** 'Youth work: a manifesto for our times', *Youth and Policy*, 88, pp. 7-27.
- Davies, B. (2008)** *The New Labour Years: A History of the Youth Service in England 1997-2007*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.
- Davies, B. (2010)** 'Straws in the Wind: The state of youth work in a changing policy environment', *Youth and Policy*, 105, pp. 9-36.
- Davies, B. (2011)** 'Youth work stories: in search of qualitative evidence on process and impact', *Youth and Policy*, 106, pp. 5-24.
- Davies, B. & Merton, B. (2009)** 'Squaring the circle? The state of youth work in some children and young people's services', *Youth and Policy*, 103, pp. 5-24.
- Davis, R. (2009)** 'Out on the Streets with nowhere to go', *The Guardian* 15th April.
- DCLG (2006)** *Strong and Prosperous Communities – the local government white paper*, London: Department for Communities and Local Government.
- DCLG (2008)** *Communities in Control – real people real power*, London: Department for Communities and Local Government.
- DCSF (2007)** *The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.
- DCSF (2008a)** *Youth Taskforce Action Plan – give respect, get respect – youth matters*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.
- DCSF (2008b)** *Aiming High Implementation Plan: March 2008*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2008c) *Aiming High Implementation Plan: October 2008*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2008d) *Young People Leading Change*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2008e) *Staying Safe Action Plan*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2008f) *Extended Schools: Testing the delivery of the core offer in and around Extended Schools: Final Report*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2008g) *Better outcomes for Children and Young People – from talk to action* London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2008h) *Statutory Guidance on Positive Activities*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2009a) 'Collection of Data on positive activities for young people' *Letter to Local authority Directors of Children's Services*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2009b) *Information and signposting project: sharing the learning Taking positive activities information further*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2009c) *Positive Activities: Qualitative Research with Young People*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2009d) *Transport Guidance: Supporting access to positive activities*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2009e) *Attitudinal barriers to Engaging Young People in Positive Activities*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2010a) *Aiming High for young people: Three years on*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2010b) *Aiming High for young people: Three years on evidence annexe*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2010c) *Quality Standards for Positive Activities*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF (2010d) *Positive Activities, good practice guide*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DCSF & DCMS (2008) *PE and Sport Strategy for Young People*, London: Department for Children Schools and Families.

DfE (2011) *Positive for Youth: A new approach to cross- government policy for young people ages 13-19*, London: Department for Education.

DfES (2002) *Transforming Youth Work - resourcing excellent youth services*, London: Department for Education and Skills.

DfES (2005) *Youth Matters*, London: Department for Education and Skills.

- DfES (2006a) *Youth Matters: Next steps*, London: Department for Education and Skills.
- DfES (2007a) *Raising Expectations: staying on in education and Training post 16*, London: Department for Education and Skills.
- DfES (2007b) *Targeted youth Support – a guide*, London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Delgado, M. (2006) *Designs and Methods for Youth Led Research*, London: Sage.
- Denzin, N. (1997) *Interpretive Ethnography*, Thousand Oaks: Sage
- Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (2008) 'Introduction – the Discipline and Practice of Qualitative research', in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (eds) *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (3rd ed), Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dolowitz, D. & Marsh, D. (1996) 'Who Learns What from Whom: a Review of the Policy Transfer Literature', *Political Studies*, 44 (2) pp. 343–57.
- Downe, J. & Martin, S. (2006) 'Joined up Policy in practice? The coherence and impacts of the local government modernisation agenda', *Local Government Studies*, 32 (4) pp. 465–488.
- Driver, S. & Martell, L. (1998) *New Labour: Politics after Thatcherism*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Duke, K. (2002) 'Getting beyond the 'official line': reflections on dilemmas of access, knowledge and power in researching policy networks', *Journal of Social Policy* 31 (1) pp. 39–59.
- Durose, C. (2011) 'Revisiting Lipsky: Front-line work in UK Local Governance', *Political Studies*, 59 (4) pp. 978–993.
- Dwyer, P. & Ellison, N. (2009) 'We nicked stuff from all over the place': policy transfer or muddling through?', *Policy and Politics*, 37 (3) pp. 389–407.
- Edwards, L. & Hatch, B. (2003) *Passing Time: A report about young people and communities*, London: IPPR.
- Ellison, N. & Pierson, C. (2003) *Developments in British Social Policy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ellison, N. & Ellison, S. (2006) 'Creating 'opportunity for all'? New Labour, New Localism and the Opportunity Society', *Social Policy and Society*, 5 (3) pp. 337–348.
- Eraut, M. (2008) 'Learning from other people in the workplace', in Hall, K., Murphy, P., & Soler, J. (eds) *Pedagogy and Practice*, London: Sage
- Evans, K. (1998) *Shaping Futures: Learning for Competence and Citizenship*, Ashgate: Aldershot.
- Evans, M. (2009) 'Gordon Brown and public management reform – a project in search of a 'big idea'', *Policy Studies*, 30 (1) pp. 33–51.

- Fairclough, N. (2000) 'Discourse, social theory and social research: the discourse of welfare reform', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 4 (2) pp. 163-195.
- Fairclough, N. (2001) 'The Discourse of New Labour: Critical Discourse Analysis', in Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. & Yates, S. (eds) *Discourse as Data: a guide for analysis*, Sage: London.
- Fairclough, N. & Wodak, R. (2004) 'Critical Discourse Analysis', in Seale, C. (ed) *Social Research methods – a reader*, London: Routledge.
- Feinstein, L., Duckworth, K. & Sabates, R. (2004) 'A Model of the Inter-generational Transmission of Educational Success, Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No. 10, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning' London: Institute of Education
- Feinstein, L., Bynner, J., & Duckworth, K. (2006) 'Young People's Leisure Contexts and their relation to adult outcomes', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 9 (3) pp. 305-327.
- Fischer, F. (2003) *Reframing Public Policy*, Oxford: OUP.
- Flint, J. (2002) 'Social Housing Agencies and the Governance of Anti Social Behaviour', *Housing Studies*, 17 (4) pp. 619-637.
- France, A. (2004) 'Young People', in Fisher, S., Lewis, V., Ding, S., Kellett, M. & Robinson, C. (eds) *Doing Research with Children and Young People*, London: Sage.
- France, A. & Meredith, J. (2009) 'Giving Respect: the 'new' responsibilities of youth in the transition towards citizenship', in Millie, A. (ed) *Securing Respect: Behavioural expectations and anti social behaviour in the UK*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Fraser, S. & Robinson, C. (2004) 'Paradigms and Philosophy', in Fisher, S., Lewis, V., Ding, S., Kellett, M. & Robinson, C. (eds) *Doing Research with Children and Young People*, London: Sage.
- Freeman, R. (2006a) 'Learning in Public Policy', in Moran, M., Rein, M. & Goodin, R. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*, Oxford: OUP.
- Freeman, R. (2006b) 'The work the document does: research, policy and equity in Health', *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 31(1) pp. 51-71.
- Freeman, R. (2007) 'Epistemological Bricolage: How practitioners make sense of Learning' *Administration and Society*, 39 (4) pp. 476-496.
- Freeman, R. (2008a) 'Learning by Meeting', *Critical Policy Studies*, 2 (1) pp. 1-24.
- Freeman, R. (2008b) 'Policy moves: translation, policy and politics' Unpublished paper. [Available from: <http://www.richardfreeman.info/>]
- Freeman, R. (2009) 'What is 'translation'?', *Evidence and Policy*, 5 (4) pp. 429-447.
- Freeman, R., Griggs, S. & Boaz, A. (2011) 'The practice of policy making', *Evidence & Policy*, 7 (2) pp. 127-136.
- Freeman, R. & Maybin, J. (2011) 'Documents, practices and policy', *Evidence and Policy*, 7 (2) pp. 155-170.
- Friedman, B. (2006) 'Policy analysis as organizational analysis', in Moran, M., Rein, M. & Goodin, R. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*, Oxford: OUP.

- Geertz, C. (1994) 'The Use of Diversity', in Borofsky, R. (ed) *Assessing Cultural Anthropology*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Glendinning, C. & Powell, M. (2002) 'Introduction', in Glendinning, C., Powell, M. & Rummary, K. (eds) *Partnerships, New Labour and The Governance of welfare*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Giddens, A. (1998) *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Griffin, C. (1993) *Representations of Youth: the study of youth and adolescence in Britain and America*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Griffin, C. (2008) 'Representations of the Young', in Roche, J., Tucker, S., Thomson, R. & Flynn, R. (eds) *Youth in Society Second Edition*, London: Sage.
- Griffiths, S. (2009) 'The public services under Gordon Brown: Similar reforms, less money', *Policy Studies* 30 (1) pp. 53-67.
- Griggs, S., Freeman, R., Farrelly, M. & Freeman, T. (2009) *Policy as practice: understanding the work of policy-makers ESRC Research Seminar Proposal* [Available from: http://www.inlogov.bham.ac.uk/seminars/policy_practice/pdfs/seminar_proposal.pdf]
- Guenther, K. (2009) 'The politics of names: rethinking the methodological and ethical significance of naming people, organisations and places', *Qualitative Research*, 9 (4) pp. 411-421.
- Gunn, R. (2008) 'The power to shape decisions? An exploration of young people's power in participation', *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 16 (3) pp. 253-261.
- Hajer, M. & Wagenaar, H. (2003) *'Deliberative Policy Analysis: understanding governance in the network society'*, Cambridge: CUP.
- Hall, P. (1993). 'Paradigms, Social Learning and the State: The Case of Economic Policy-Making in Britain.' *Comparative Politics*, 25 (3) pp. 275-296.
- Hall, P. (2005) 'Interprofessional teamwork: Professional cultures as barriers', *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, (Supplement 1) pp. 188-196.
- Hall, T., Coffey, A. & Williamson, H. (1999) 'Self, Space and Place: Youth Identities and Citizenship', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20 (4) pp. 501-513.
- Hall, T. & Williamson, H. (1999) *Citizenship and Community*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.
- Hallsworth, M. & Rutter, J. (2011) *Making Policy Better: Improving Whitehall's core business*, London: Institute for Government
- Halsey, K. & White, R. (2008) *Young people, crime and public perceptions: a review of the literature*, Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research.

- Hammersley, M. (2010) 'Reproducing or constructing? Some questions about transcription in social research', *Qualitative Research*, 10 (5) pp. 553-569.
- Handley, H., Sturdey, A., Fincham, R. & Clark, T. (2006) 'Within and beyond communities of practice: making sense of learning through participation, identity and practice', *Journal of Management Studies*, 43 (3) pp. 641-653.
- Handy, C. (1993) *Understanding Organisations* (4th ed), London: Penguin.
- Harrison, R. (2011) *Youth: Policy in Practice Module E318* [Course material available from:
<http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=406960&direct=1>]
- Hatch, M. & Cunliffe, A. (2006) *Organisation Theory: modern, symbolic and postmodern perspectives*, Oxford: OUP
- Hawes, D. (2000) 'Interpreting the new political culture', *Policy and Politics*, 28 (2) pp. 263-268.
- Heath, S., Brooks, R., Cleaver, E. & Ireland, E. (2009) *Researching Young People's Lives*, London: Sage.
- Henderson S. (2007) 'Neighbourhood', in Robb, M. (eds) *Youth in Context: frameworks, settings and encounters*, London: Sage.
- Hewton, J., Agur, M. & Sproston, K. (2008) *Empowering Young People Pilot Interim Evaluation*, London: National Centre for Social Research.
- Higgs, L. (2010) 'Loughton calls for overhaul of local authority youth services'. *Children and Young People Now* 8th July.
- HM Government (2008) *Youth Crime Action Plan*, London: Central Office of Information.
- HM Government (2009) *New Opportunities: fair chances for the futures*, London: Central Office of Information.
- HM Treasury (2006) *Written ministerial statement: Children and Young People's Review* [Accessed online www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/cyp_statement050706.pdf]
- HM Treasury/DfES (2007) *Policy Review of Children and Young People: A Discussion Paper*, London: HM Treasury.
- HM Treasury (2007) *PSA Delivery Agreement 14: Increase the number of children and young people on the path to success*, London: HM Treasury.
- Hodge, M. (2005) 'Youth of Today' *Speech at IPPR* January.
- Hodgson, S. & Irving, Z. (2007) 'Policy and its exploration', in Hodgson, S. & Irving, Z. (eds) *Policy Reconsidered: Meanings, politics and practices*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Hodkinson, P. & Hodkinson, H. (2001) 'The strengths and limitations of case study research', *Paper presented to the LSDA Conference Making an impact on policy and practice* Cambridge 5-7th December.
- Hofstede, G. (1991) *Cultures and organisations: software of the mind*, Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.

- Hoggett, P. (2006) 'Conflict, ambivalence and the contested purpose of public organisations', *Human Relations*, 59 (2) pp. 175-194.
- Hogwood, B. & Gunn, L. (1984) 'Why 'perfect implementation' is unattainable', in Hill, M. (ed) (1997) *The Policy Process: A Reader*, London: Prentice Hall.
- Holstein, J. & Gubrium, J. (1997) 'Active interviewing', in Silverman, D. (ed) *Qualitative Research: theory, method and practice*, London: Sage.
- Holland, J. (2009) 'Young People and social capital: Uses and abuses?', *Young* 17 (4) pp. 331-350.
- Hudson, B. (1989) 'Michael Lipsky and street level bureaucracy: a neglected perspective', in Hill, M. (ed) (1997) *The Policy Process: A Reader*, London: Prentice Hall.
- Hughes, B. (2006a) *Young People Now Youth Matters Green Paper Conference*, Ministerial speech 30th March.
- Hughes, B. (2006b) 'The Best Years? Children, young people and family policy', *Speech at IPPR*, 19th July.
- Hughes, B. (2007) 'Positive strategies for combating violence and misbehaviour by young people', *Speech to the NYA Conference Ministerial Speech*, 5th December [Accessed online at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20080107205405/http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/speeches/speech.cfm?SpeechID=739>]
- Hughes, B. (2008) *Letter to Directors of Children's Services, Chief Executives, Lead members on positive activities*, London: Department of Children Schools and Families.
- Hughes, B. (2009a) 'Positive Activities', *Speech to the LGA Conference* 27th April [Accessed online at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090703095613/http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/speeches/search_detail.cfm?ID=898]
- Hughes, B. (2009b) *Open Letter to local authorities on Friday and Saturday night opening April*, London: Department of Children Schools and Families.
- Hughes, B. (2010) 'Youth Policy stopped', *Children and Young People Now* 12th October.
- Huxham, C. & Vangen, S. (1996) 'Working together: key themes in the management of relationships between public and non-profit organisations', *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 9 (7) pp. 5-17.
- Iedema, R. & Wodak, R. (1999) 'Organisational discourses and practices', *Discourse and Society*, 10 (1) pp. 5-19.
- Imrie, R. & Raco, M. (eds) (2003) *Urban Renaissance? New Labour, community and urban policy*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Jeffs, T. (2011) 'Running out of options: re-modelling youth work', *Youth and Policy*, 106 pp. 1-8.

Jenkins, R. (2007) 'The meaning of policy / policy as meaning', in Hodgson, S. & Irving, Z. (eds) *Policy Reconsidered: Meanings, politics and practices*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

John, P. (2006) 'Explaining policy change' in Budd, L., Charlesworth, J. & Paton, R. (eds) *Making Policy Happen*, Oxford: Routledge.

Johnstone, C. (2004) 'Crime, Disorder and Urban renaissance', in Johnstone, C. & Whitehead, M. (eds) *New Horizons in British Urban Policy*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Keith, M. (1992) 'Angry writing: (re)presenting the unethical world of the ethnographer', *Environment and Planning: Society and Space*, 10 (5) pp. 551-568.

Keith M. (2004) 'Knowing the City? 21st Century Urban Policy and the Introduction of Local Strategic Partnerships', in Johnstone, C. & Whitehead M. (eds) *New Horizons in British Urban Policy. Perspectives on New Labour's Urban Renaissance*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Kelly, A. (2007) Interview: Fiona Blacke, *The Guardian*, 5th Dec.

Kelly, J. (2007) 'Reforming Public Services in the UK: Bringing in the third sector', *Public Administration*, 85 (4) pp. 1003-1022.

Kelly, M. & Ali, S. (2004) 'Ethics and Social Research', in Seale, C. (ed) *Researching Society and Culture*, London: Sage.

Kernaghan, K. (2006) 'The Post-bureaucratic Organisation and Public Service Value' in Budd, L., Charlesworth, J. & Paton, R. (eds) *Making Policy Happen*, Oxford: Routledge.

Kezar, A. (2003) 'Transformational Elite interviews: principles and problems', *Qualitative inquiry*, 9 (3) pp. 395-415.

Kingdon, J. (1995) *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, London: Harper Collins.

Kintrea, K., Bannister, J., Pickering, J., Reid, M. & Suzuki, N. (2008) *Young people and territoriality in British cities*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Klijn, E. & Koppenjan, J. (2006) 'Public management and policy networks – foundations of a network approach to governance', in Budd, L., Charlesworth, J. & Paton, R. (eds) *Making Policy Happen*, Oxford: Routledge.

Klijn, E. & Skelcher, C. (2007) 'Democracy and governance networks – compatible or not?', *Public Administration*, 85 (3) pp. 587-608.

Knight, P. & Saunders, M. (1999) 'Understanding Teachers' Professional Cultures Through Interviews: A Constructivist approach', *Evaluation and Research in Education*, 13 (3) pp. 144-156.

Kothari, A., MacLean, L. & Edwards, N. (2009) 'Increasing capacity for knowledge translation: understanding how some researchers engage policy makers'. *Evidence and Policy*, 5 (1) pp. 33-51.

Lauder, H., Brown, P. & Halsey, A. (2004) 'Sociology and Political Arithmetic: some principles of a new policy science', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 55 (1) pp. 3-22.

Laws, D. & Hajer, M. (2006) 'Policy in Practice', in Moran, M., Rein, M. & Goodin, R. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*, Oxford: OUP.

Lendvai, N. & Stubbs, P. (2007) 'Policies as translation: situating transnational policies', in Hodgson, S. & Irving, Z. (eds) *Policy Reconsidered: Meanings, politics and practices*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

Levitas, R. (1998) *The inclusive society? Social exclusion and New Labour*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Lewis, G (2000) 'Introduction: expanding the Social Policy Imaginary' in Lewis, G; Gerwirtz, S & Clarke, J (eds) *Rethinking Social Policy* London: Sage.

Lewis, J. (2005) 'New Labour's Approach to the Voluntary Sector: Independence and the Meaning of Partnership', *Social Policy and Society*, 4 (2) pp. 121-131.

LGA (2007) *Aiming High for young people: A ten year strategy for positive activities*, 26th July 2007 Briefing paper, London: Local Government Association.

LGA (2012) *Independence from the centre: does local government's freedom lie in a new constitutional settlement?*, London: Local Government Association.

Lipsky, M. (1980) 'Street-level bureaucracy: an introduction', in Hill, M. (ed) (1997) *The Policy Process: A Reader*, London: Prentice Hall.

Lister, R. (2005) 'Young people and citizenship', in Barry, M. (ed) *Youth Policy and Social inclusion: critical debates with young people*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Little, A. (2002) *The Politics of Community*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Loffler, E. (2003) 'Governance: Networking with stakeholders', in Bovaird, T. & Loffler, E. (eds) *Public Management and Governance*, London: Routledge.

Lowndes, V. & Sullivan, H. (2004) 'Like a Horse and Carriage or a Fish on a Bicycle: How Well do Local Partnerships and Public Participation go together?', *Local Government Studies*, 30 (1) pp. 51-73.

Lukes, S. (2005) *Power: A Radical View* (2nd ed), Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lyons, M. (2007) *Place shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government*, London: The Stationary Office.

Macleavy, J. (2006) 'The Language of Politics and the Politics of Language: Unpacking 'social exclusion' in New Labour Policy', *Space and Polity*, (10) 1 pp. 87-98.

Macmillan, R. & Scott, A. (2002) 'On the case? Dilemmas of collaborative research', *Area*, 35 (1) pp. 101-109.

Make Space (2004) *Youth Offer for the 21st Century*, London: 4 Children.

Marston, G. (2004) *Social Policy and Discourse Analysis*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Martin, J. (2002) *Organizational culture: Mapping the Terrain*, London: Sage.

Mason, J. (1996) *Qualitative researching*, London: Sage.

- Mason, J. (2006)** 'Six strategies for mixing methods and linking data in social science research', *Working Paper, Real Life Methods*, Manchester: University of Manchester.
- Mason, J. (2007)** 'Re-using Qualitative Data: on the merits of an investigative epistemology', *Sociological Research Online*, 12 (3) [Accessed online at: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/12/3/3.html>].
- McAuley, C. & Cleaver, D. (2006)** *Improving service delivery- introducing outcomes-based accountability*, London: Improvement and Development Agency.
- McKee, V. (2011)** 'Freedom, Fairness and responsibility: Youth work offers the way forward', *Youth and Policy* 106 pp. 9-22.
- McMahon, W. (2006)** 'The Politics of Anti Social Behaviour', *Safer Society* 28.
- Merton, B. (2004)** *An evaluation of the impact of youth work in England*, London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Merton, B., Comfort, H. & Payne, M. (2007)** 'Recognising and Recording the impact of youth work', in Harrison, R., Benjamin, C., Curran, C. & Hunter, R. (eds) *Leading Work with Young People*, London: Sage.
- Milbourne, L. (2009)** 'Remodelling the Third Sector: advancing collaboration or competition in community-based initiatives', *Journal of Social Policy*, 38 (2) pp. 277-297.
- Miles, M. & Huberman, A. (1994)** *Qualitative Data Analysis*, London: Sage.
- Miliband, D. (2005)** 'Power to Neighbourhoods – the challenges for Urban regeneration', *Ministerial speech*, 12th October.
- Miller J. & Glassner, B. (1997)** 'The 'inside' and the 'outside': Finding realities in interviews', in Silverman, D. *Qualitative Research: theory, method and practice*, London: Sage.
- Millie, A., Jacobson, H., McDonald, E. & Hough, M. (2005)** *Anti Social Behaviour Strategies: Finding a Balance*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Mizen, P. (2002)** 'Putting the Politics back into Youth Studies: Keynesianism, Monetarism and the changing state of youth', *Journal of Youth Studies* 5 (1) pp. 5-20.
- Mizen, P. (2003)** 'Best days of your life? Youth, policy and Blair's New Labour', *Critical Social Policy*, 23 (4) pp. 453-476.
- Monahan, T. & Fisher, J. (2010)** 'Benefits of 'observer effects': lessons from the field', *Qualitative Research*, 10 (3) pp. 357-376.
- Mulgan, G. & Bury, F. (2006)** *Double devolution: the renewal of local government*, London: the Smith Institute.
- Mullholland, H. (2008)** 'Brown promises 'third stage' of public sector reform', *The Guardian*, 10th March.
- Munro, H., Roberts, M. & Skelcher, C. (2008)** 'Partnership Governance and Democratic Effectiveness: community leaders and public managers as dual intermediaries', *Public Policy and Administration*, 23 (1) pp. 61-79.

NCVYS (2007) *Policy Briefing: Aiming High for Young People July 2007*, London: National Council for Voluntary Youth Services.

NCVYS (2008) *Aiming High for young People: views of the voluntary and community sector*, London: National Council for Voluntary Youth Services.

Neal, S. & McLaughlin, E. (2009) 'Researching up? Interviews, emotionality and policy-making elites', *Journal of Social Policy*, 38 (4) pp. 689-707.

Newman, J. (2002) 'Changing Governance, Changing Equality? New Labour, Modernisation and Public Services', *Public Money and Management* 22 pp. 7-14.

**Newman, J. (2004) 'Through Thick or Thin? The Problem of "the Social" in Societal Governance,' *Paper presented to the Contemporary Governance and the Question of the Social Conference, University of Alberta, 11-13 June*
[http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/ccig/ccigsubset/cciginfopops/societal_governance.pdf].**

Newman, J. (2005) 'Participative governance and the remaking of the public sphere in', Newman, J (ed) *Remaking governance: peoples, politics and the public sphere*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

Newman, J. (2006) 'Joined-up Government: the Politics of Partnership' in Budd, L., Charlesworth, J. & Paton, R. (eds) *Making Policy Happen*, Oxford: Routledge.

Newman, J. (2007) 'Governance as cultural practice: texts, talk and the struggle for meaning', in Bevir, M. & Trentman, F. (eds) *Governance, consumers and citizens*, London: Palgrave.

Newman, J. (2009) *Policy as Text*, Paper presented at the Open University Social Sciences Postgraduate Seminar Series, 9th December.

NYA (2006a) *Young People, Youth Work, Youth Services: an introductory Guide*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.

NYA (2006b) *Demonstrating the impact of youth work*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.

NYA (2006c) *The Contribution of youth work to the Every Child Matters Outcomes*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.

NYA (2007) *Spotlight: Message from the Youth Summit*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.

NYA (2008a) *The Contribution of Non-formal learning to young people's life chances: Executive Summary*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.

NYA (2008b) *Aiming High for Young People: Nine Regional Events Oct-Dec 2007, Summary and Action points* Leicester; National Youth Agency.

NYA (2008c) *Recording Positive Activities Data*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.

NYA (2008d) *Recording Young People's Progress through Youth Work*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.

O'Brien, M; Clayton, S; Varga-Atkins, T. & Qualter, A. (2008) 'Power and the theory-and-practice conundrum: the experience of doing research with a local authority', *Evidence and Policy* 4 (4) pp. 371-390.

Ofsted (2009) *Engaging Young People: Local authority youth work 2005-08*, London: Ofsted.

Ofsted (2010) *Supporting Young People: An Evaluation of recent reforms to youth support services in 11 local areas*, London: Ofsted.

O'Laughlin, B. (1998) 'Interpreting Institutional Discourses' in Thomas, A., Chataway, J. & Wuyts, M. (eds) *Finding out fast: investigative skills for policy and development*, London: Sage.

Oldfield, C. & Merton, B. (2011) *Mindsets and Mechanisms – making integration work in youth support services*, Reading: Centre for Better Teaching Education Trust.

Ord, J. (2007) *Youth work process, product and practice*, Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing.

Painter, J. (2006) 'Prosaic geographies of stateness', *Political Geography*, 25 pp. 752-774.

Paraskeva, J. (1992) 'Youth Work and informal education', in Coleman, J. & Warren-Adamson, C. (eds) *Youth Policy in the 1990s: the way forward*, London: Routledge.

Parry, R. & Kerr, M. (2007) 'Joined-up policy making', in Bochel, H. & Duncan, S. (eds) *Making Policy in Theory and Practice*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

Parton, N. (2006) 'Every Child Matters: The shift to prevention whilst strengthening protection in children's services in England', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28 pp. 976-992.

Paton, R. (2006) 'Measurement and its pitfalls', in Budd, L., Charlesworth, J. & Paton, R. (eds) *Making Policy Happen*, Oxford: Routledge.

Payne, M. (2009) 'Modern youth work: 'purity' or common cause?', in Wood, J. & Hine, J. (eds) *Work with Young People: Theory and Policy for Practice*, London: Sage.

Perkins, D., Borden, L., Villaruel, F., Carlton-Hug, A., Stone, M. & Keith, J. (2007) 'Participation in structured youth programs: why ethnic minority urban youth choose to participate – or not to participate', *Youth Society*, 38 (4) pp. 420-442.

Pierre, J. (2009) 'Reinventing Governance, reinventing democracy?', *Policy and Politics*, 37 (4) pp. 591-609.

Pierre, J. & Peters, G. (2006a) 'Governance at three levels', in Budd, L., Charlesworth, J. & Paton, R. (eds) *Making Policy Happen*, Oxford: Routledge.

Pierre, J. & Peters, G. (2006b) 'Communitarianism, Deliberation, direct Democracy and Governance', in Budd, L., Charlesworth, J. & Paton, R. (eds) *Making Policy Happen*, Oxford: Routledge.

Pollitt, C. (2006) 'Is the Emperor in his underwear? An analysis of the impacts of public management reform', in Budd, L., Charlesworth, J. & Paton, R. (eds) *Making Policy Happen*, Oxford: Routledge.

- Pope, C., Robert, G., Bate, P., Le May, A. & Gabbay, J. (2006) 'Lost in Translation: a multi level case study of the metamorphosis of meanings and action in public sector organisational innovation', *Public Administration*, 84 (1) pp. 59-80.
- Potter, S. & Subrahmanian, R. (1998) 'Conceptualising Policy-related Investigation', in Thomas, A., Chataway, J. & Wuyts, M. (eds) *Finding out fast: investigative skills for policy and development*, London: Sage.
- Powell, M. (2000) 'New Labour and the third way in the British Welfare State – a distinctive approach?', *Critical Social Policy*, 20 (1) pp. 39-60.
- Powell, M. & Dowling, B. (2006) 'New Labour's Partnerships: Comparing conceptual models with existing forms', *Social Policy and Society*, 5 (2) pp. 305-314.
- Powell, M. & Exworthy, M. (2002) 'Partnerships, quasi-networks and social policy', in Glendinning, C., Powell, M. & Rummery, K. (eds) *Partnerships, New Labour and The Governance of welfare*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Primarolo, D. (2010) 'Teenagers need workers with the right Skills', *Children and Young People Now*, 1st Jan.
- Prior, L. (1997) 'Following in Foucault's Footsteps: Text and context in Qualitative Research', in Silverman, D. (ed) *Qualitative Research: theory, method and practice*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Pritzlaff, T. & Nullmeier, F. (2011) 'Capturing Practice', *The Policy Press*, 7 (2) pp. 37-54.
- Pugh, G. & Parton, N. (2003) Editorial to *Children and Society*, 17 pp. 57-61.
- Putnam, D. (2000) *Bowling Alone*, New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.
- Rapley, T. (2001) 'The Art(fullness) of open-ended interviewing: some considerations on analysing interviews', *Qualitative Research* 1 (3) pp. 303-323.
- Reeves, C. (2010) 'A difficult negotiation: fieldwork relations with gatekeepers', *Qualitative Research*, 10 (3) pp. 315-331.
- Rhodes, R. (2006) 'Policy Network Analysis', in Moran, M., Rein, M. & Goodin, R. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*, Oxford: OUP.
- Riessman, C. (2008) *Narrative methods for the human sciences*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Rist, R. (2000) 'Influencing the Policy Process with Qualitative Research', in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd ed)*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (2003) *Qualitative Research Practice: A guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, London: Sage.
- Rixon, A. (2007) 'Practitioners', in Robb, M. (ed) *Youth in Context: frameworks, settings and encounters*, London: Sage.
- Roberts, J. (2006) 'Limits to Communities of Practice', *Journal of Management Studies*, 43 (3) pp. 623-39.
- Roberts, K. (2005) 'Youth, leisure and social activities', in Barry, M. (ed) *Youth Policy and Social inclusion: critical debates with young people*, Abingdon: Routledge.

- Roberts, S. (2007) 'Opinion Money is great, but action is needed to', *Children and Young People now* 6th September.
- Robinson, S. (2008) 'Trusting the method: An ethnographic search for policy in practice in an Australian primary School', *Ethnography and Education*, 3 (3) pp. 243-252.
- Rogers, B. & Robinson, E. (2004) *The Benefits of Community Engagement*, London: Active Citizenship Centre, Home Office.
- Rose, N. (1999) *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, Cambridge: CUP.
- Roulston, K. (2010) 'Considering quality in qualitative interviewing', *Qualitative research*, 10 (2) pp. 199-228.
- Savage, M. & Burrows, R. (2007) 'The Coming Crisis of Empirical Sociology', *Sociology*, 41 (5) pp. 885-899.
- Schwandt, T. (1998) 'Three Epistemological Stances for Qualitative Inquiry', in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (eds) *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*, London: Sage.
- Seale, C. (1998) 'Introduction' in Seale, C. (ed) *Researching Society and Culture*, London: Sage.
- Seale, C. (2004) 'Validity, reliability and the quality of research', in Seale, C. (ed) (2nd *Researching Society and Culture* (2nd ed), London: Sage.
- Schein, E. (2004) *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (3rd ed), San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Silverman, D. (1998) 'Research and Social Policy', in Seale, C. (ed) *Researching Society and Culture*, London: Sage.
- Silverman, D. (2004) *Doing Qualitative Research* (2nd ed), London: Sage.
- Silverman, D. (2006) *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*, London: Sage
- Sinclair, R. (2004) 'Participation in Practice: making it meaningful, effective and sustainable', *Children and Society*, 18 pp. 106-118.
- Smircich, L. (1983) 'Concepts of culture and organisational analysis', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28 pp. 339-358.
- Smith, G. & May, D. (1980) 'The Artificial debate between rationalist and incrementalist models of decision making', in Hill, M. (ed) (1997) *The Policy Process: A Reader*, London: Prentice Hall.
- Social Exclusion Unit (2000) *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: Report of Policy Action Team 12: Young People*, London: Social Exclusion Unit.
- Social Exclusion Unit (2004) *Breaking the Cycle: Taking stock of progress and priorities for the future*, London: Social Exclusion Unit.
- Sparrow, A. (2009) 'Brown launches plan to fund 35,000 apprenticeships on tour of regions', *The Guardian* 7th January.

- Spence, J. (2005) 'Concepts of Youth', in Harrison, R. & Wise, C. (eds) *Working with Young People*, London: Sage.
- Spence, J. & Devanney, C. (2006) *Youth Work: Voices of Practice*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.
- Spencer, Z. (2007) 'Interview with Tom Wylie', [Accessed online at <https://www.enyan.co.uk/article/show/4672>]
- Squires, P. & Stephens, D. (2004) 'They're still children and entitled to be children': problematising the institutionalised mistrust of marginalised youth', *British Journal of Youth Studies*, 7 (3) pp. 351-369.
- Stacey, E. & Griffin, D. (2005) *A complexity perspective on researching organisations: taking experience seriously*, Oxford: Routledge.
- Stake, R. (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Stake, R. (2008) 'Qualitative Case studies', in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (3rd ed), California: Sage.
- Sterling, R. (2005) 'Promoting democratic governance through partnerships', in Newman, J. (ed) *Remaking governance: peoples, politics and the public sphere*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Stoker, G. (2004) *Transforming local governance: from Thatcherism to New Labour*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Strach, P. & Everett, A. (2008) 'Transforming research case studies into teaching cases', *Qualitative research in Organisations and Management*, 3 (3) pp.199-214.
- Such, E. & Walker, R. (2005) 'Young Citizens or Policy Objects? Children in the 'Rights and Responsibilities' Debate', *Journal of Social Policy*, 34 (1) pp. 39-57.
- Taylor, S. (2001) 'Locating and Conducting Discourse Analytic Research', in Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. & Yates, S. (eds) *Discourse as Data: a guide for analysis*, Sage: London.
- Thomas, G. (2010) 'Doing Case Study: Abduction Not Induction, Phronesis Not Theory', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16 (7) pp. 575-582.
- Tichelar, M. & Watts, L. (2000) 'Role players and authority figures: informal power relationships within local authorities', *Policy and Politics*, 28 (2) pp. 221-231.
- Tiotto, J. (2006) *Getting our house in order – better results for children and young people*, London: Improvement and Development Agency.
- Tisdall, E. & Davis, J. (2004) 'Making a difference? Bringing Children's and Young People's Views into Policy-making', *Children and Society*, 18 pp. 131-142.
- Tonkiss, F. (2004) 'Using Focus groups', in Seale, C. (ed) *Researching Society and Culture* (2nd ed), London: Sage.
- Tsolidis, G. (2008) 'The (im)possibility of poststructuralist ethnography – researching identities in borrowed spaces', *Ethnography and Education*, 3 (3) pp. 271-281.

- Wagenaar, H. & Cook, S. (2003) 'Understanding policy practices: action, dialectic and deliberation in policy analysis', in Hajer, M. & Wagenaar, H. (eds) (2003) *Deliberative Policy Analysis: understanding governance in the network society*, Cambridge: CUP.
- Wagenaar, H. (2004) ' "Knowing" the Rules: Administrative Work as Practice', *Public Administration Review*, 64 (6) pp. 643-655.
- Walsh, D. (2004) 'Doing Ethnography', in Seale, C. (ed) *Researching Society and Culture* (2nd ed), London: Sage.
- Walker, D. (2007) *Real Localism*, London: The Smith Institute.
- Watson, R. (2010) 'Local voluntary groups warn of dangers of outsourcing council youth services', *Children and Young People Now*, 4th May.
- Wells, P. (2007) 'New Labour and evidence based policy making 1997-2007', *People, Place and Policy Online*, 1 (1) pp. 22-29.
- Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E. (2004) 'Knowledge management as a doughnut: shaping your knowledge strategy through communities of practice', *Ivey Business Journal* (Jan/Feb) pp. 1-8.
- Whitehead, M. (2007) 'The architecture of partnerships: urban communities in the shadow of hierarchy', *The Policy Press*, 35 (1) pp. 3-23.
- Williamson, H. (2002) *Supporting Young People in Europe: principles, policy and practice*, Council of Europe Publishing: Strasbourg.
- Williamson, H. (2005) 'Young people and social inclusion – an overview of policy and practice', in Barry, M. (ed) *Youth Policy and Social inclusion: critical debates with young people*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Williamson, H. (2006) *Youth work and the changing policy environment for young people*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.
- Williamson, H. & Weatherspoon, K. (1985) *Strategies for Intervention: An approach to youth and community work in an area of social deprivation*, Penarth: Council for Wales Voluntary Youth Sector.
- Willis, M., Jimpson, G., Daziel, R., & Ali, J. (2008) *Commissioning Positive Activities for young people*, Leicester: National Youth Agency.
- Willis, P. & Trondman, M. (2000) 'Manifesto for Ethnography', *Ethnography*, 1 (1) pp. 5-16.
- Woodhouse, P. (1998) 'People as informants', in Thomas, A., Chataway, J. & Wuyts, M. (eds) *Finding out fast: investigative skills for policy and development*, London: Sage.
- Wylie, T. (2008) 'Young People, Central Government and Youth Work', *Youth and Policy*, 100 pp. 91-101.
- Wylie, T. (2010) 'Youth Work in a Cold Climate', *Youth & Policy*, 105 pp. 1-8.
- Yanow, D. (2009) 'Organisational ethnography and methodological angst: myths and challenges in the field', *Qualitative Research in Organisations*, 4 (2) pp. 186-199.

Yates, S. & Payne, M. (2007) 'Minding the Gap between policy visions and service implementation: Lessons from Connexions', *Youth and Policy* 95 pp.25-40.

Young Foundation (2012) *A framework of outcomes for young people's services*, London: The Young Foundation.

Appendix

APPENDIX 1: Excerpt from the original CASE Research studentship proposal

Further information for enquirers
CASE Research Studentship:
Policy-action dialogues in work with young people

SECTION B: THE RESEARCH TOPIC

Services for young people are under-going major changes that are often controversial, not least with front-line professionals. Government policy was set out in Youth Matters (2005), and Youth Matters: next steps (2006), which developed proposals for a 'radical reshaping of universal services for teenagers - with targeted support for those who need it most'. Since January 2007 there has been a statutory duty on local authorities, working in partnership with the voluntary and private sectors, to promote the well-being of young people by securing access to educational and recreational leisure-time activities (referred to as 'positive activities'). This should include: access to two hours per week of sporting activity and two hours per week of constructive activities in clubs, youth groups and classes. These might include young people's own hobbies and interests; personal, social and spiritual development activities; study support; activities encouraging creativity, innovation and enterprise; residential opportunities; opportunities to make a positive contribution through volunteering; a wide range of other recreational, cultural and sporting and enriching experiences; safe and enjoyable places to spend time, including socialising with friends. In July 2007, the government published 'Aiming high for young people', which sets out a ten-year strategy for positive activities. The strategy has a particular stress on improving local youth facilities, increasing young people's influence over activities and provision (including direct control of some budgets) and developing the youth workforce.

To be carried through successfully, these far-reaching changes require a developing compatibility among the understandings held by the differentiated but interdependent parties centrally involved. This is particularly important as local authorities create new arrangements for the governance of provision through the creation of Children and Young People's Trusts. However, as always, those involved live and work in very different worlds between which communication is often problematic. The project seeks to investigate the processes through which stakeholders with a role in developing 'positive activities' (Youth Matters, 2005) for young people communicate with each other and make sense of their contribution to achieving this policy goal.

The research question will be: How are understandings of the policy goal of providing positive outcomes for young people constituted, expressed, used, negotiated and translated in interactions between stakeholder groupings?

The stakeholders which we will be working with are:

- policy makers and politicians, responsible for setting priorities and shaping strategy. They must respond to public concern and be able to demonstrate value from publicly funded services. They set the terms of the debate and create the frameworks within which services can be planned and resourced.
- Practitioners of youth work, drawing on a knowledge base of non-formal education and a set of principles emphasising voluntary participation and educational outcomes. Their primary focus is on the particular young people they work with, while being

aware that their access to public funding and their status as valued partners in Children and Young People's Trusts are now in question.

- Young people, the co-producers of youth provision, are uniquely well informed about their experiences, the issues which impact on their lives and the forms of support which might be most helpful. Moreover, they are being given a statutory role in decision making and resource allocation.

Two other parties play central roles in the development, interpretation and enactment of policy in this field. First, the managers of public and third sector agencies intermediate between policy-makers and professional teams, setting the budgets and expectations for specific youth provision in particular areas. Secondly, researchers (from a range of disciplinary backgrounds) gather new information to inform policy-makers, managers and practitioners. While both managers and researchers are centrally concerned with communication and the generation of new understandings to facilitate effective action, they too have distinct professional identities and preoccupations. It is not unusual for these intermediators in some ways to impede the dialogue with and between the other stakeholders involved.

What is new in this situation is the now pervasive and largely accepted use of one of New Labour's generic policy thrusts - the adoption of outcomes thinking in the formulation of public policy. Indeed, 'positive outcomes' - what they are, and how they can be achieved - are the common currency of the current debates (eg, Merton et al, 2004; Feinstein et al, 2006). Since a principal rationale for an outcomes approach (eg, the seminal Williams and Webb, 1991) is precisely its value in facilitating communication and greater understanding between policy-makers, managers and professionals, the research question is pertinent and timely. Addressing the question will mean examining the processes of communication, negotiation and translation between the four principal 'levels' - policy makers, managers, practitioners and young people - through which understandings of 'positive activities for young people' are shared, debated, and pursued. The role of researchers, and the contribution and uses made of research findings, in these multi-level processes will be of particular interest.

The investigation will take a case study approach, tracking the progress of service planning and redevelopment in one Local Authority - since it is here that these processes of communication and negotiation between stakeholders can be observed. Selection of the Local Authority and the participants will be undertaken with and through the National Youth Agency, whose existing partnerships with authorities will support access to both individuals and documents. Issues of ethics and confidentiality will be discussed at an early stage.

The study will involve:

- observation of meetings within the local authority concerned with the provision of services for young people
- study of local and national policy documents, including Children and young people's plans, statutory and non-statutory guidance, performance frameworks and agreements, and local service level agreements
- interviews with stakeholders in policy development at local and (if appropriate) national level
- interviews with key figures at management and practitioner levels
- one or more focus groups with young people involved and affected

The objective will be to map and understand what is happening in and through these multi-level processes, identifying occasions and contexts when they work well (and less well), and trying to understand, when, where and why this comes about. Initial findings from this work will then be fed back to all the parties involved in culturally appropriate ways - for further discussion and reflection.

This work will then give rise to two sorts of outputs. For practitioners, policy-makers and researchers of youth provision, the outputs will take the form of conference contributions, articles, good practice guidelines, workshops and seminars. These will concern the pitfalls and possibilities of dialogue among disparate stakeholders, the different ways that 'outcomes' are construed and appropriated by them, and the extent to which different stakeholders feel

able to formulate and express their concerns in these terms. The academic outputs will of course be the thesis and journal articles.

It is expected that access would be negotiated in the last quarter of the first year, the main fieldwork and feedback would take place over the following 12 months, and the final year would be dedicated to writing up and dissemination of the findings.

RESEARCH PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

Policy-action dialogues in work with young people

Project outline

In 2007, the Government published *Aiming High for Young People* which set out a renewed ten year vision of providing positive activities for young people. *Aiming High* particularly stresses the empowerment of young people through increasing their influence over activities and provision; access to a wider range of activities in places where young people feel comfortable, and high quality integrated support services delivered by a range of partners.

My research will be exploring what the changes in *Aiming High* mean for local authorities and how a national policy translates into practice at a local level. I will be looking at:

- how positive activities are planned and commissioned
- partnership working around the delivery of positive activities
- the dilemmas and challenges for all those involved
- engagement with young people in the local authority area
- how outcomes are measured

This brief is intended to provide you with some background information about what the research entails.

Redtown as a case study

Redtown is the case study for my research. The research started in September 2009 and will last for up to a year.

The research is aiming to understand how positive activities are implemented in Redtown – looking at what the Council is doing around this policy area, and what some of the practical issues are for all those involved. The research is not aiming to find a 'right way' of doing things, but rather understand in depth what one organisation does in order to implement the *Aiming High* agenda.

I will be conducting my research through:

- **observation of meetings** taking place in Redtown around the LAA indicator target (N1 110 participation in positive activities) and any other meetings relevant to the implementation of *Aiming High*. This will involve me sitting in on meetings – but not participating in any way
- **interviews** with managers, staff and practitioners and other stakeholders involved with positive activities in Redtown to be arranged at mutually convenient times
- **Focus groups** with young people involved in designing and commissioning positive activities

Taking part in the research

Taking part in a research study involves giving information to the researcher about your work, your role and your perception of both of these. Your involvement in the research project is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time or refuse to answer questions if you do not feel it is appropriate. Your personal details will be kept

secure and confidential and your organisation will not be identifiable in any reports or articles that I write. Where excerpts from interviews are used in the final report, these will be anonymised. A confidentiality agreement has been produced with the backing of Redtown City Council, and you will be asked to sign a consent form before formal interviews or focus groups.

At the end of the study

The results of the study will be discussed and shared with my supervisors at the Open University and the external sponsors at the NYA. The results will be used to write an account of how *Aiming High* is being implemented in Redtown. Some of the results may be used for case studies and academic papers. The main output will be a doctoral thesis.

Contact details

The project is a result of a collaboration between the Open University and the National Youth Agency, with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council. I am the sole researcher, and previously worked at the Local Government Association and completed an MA at Goldsmiths University which involved work with young people in Hackney. If you have any further questions, please contact me on Louisa.Thomson@open.ac.uk or 07715 170667. If you would like to talk to a senior member of staff, Dr Kirstie Ball is the Director of Research Programmes at the Business School and her direct line is 01908 655669.

APPENDIX 3: Interviews conducted in the case study area during the fieldwork

Date	Position	Organisation	What
11/05/09	Head of Youth Services	City Council	Introductory meeting
14/09/09	Consultant on IYSS	City Council	Informal discussion
15/09/09	Council strategic participation lead	City Council	Informal discussion
15/09/09	Leader of the Council	City Council	Informal discussion
25/09/09	Head of Youth Services	City Council	Informal discussion
5/10/09	Council city wide youth worker (1)	City Council	Informal discussion
12/10/09	Freelance consultant (1)	City Council and voluntary sector	Informal discussion
20/10/09	Council Operations Manager	City Council	Informal discussion
5/11/09	Participation manager	Connexions	Informal discussion
16/11/09	Council Area manager (1)	City Council	Informal discussion
23/11/09	Council Area manager (2)	City Council	Informal discussion
23/11/09	VCS director (1)	The local Council for Voluntary Youth Services	Informal discussion
26/11/09	Involving young people co-ordinator	Connexions	Informal discussion
26/11/09	VCS director (2)	Local branch of Clubs for Young People	Informal discussion
14/12/09	Council Area Manager (3)	City Council	Informal discussion
14/12/09	VCS Participation Worker	Voluntary sector organisation focussing on participation	Informal discussion
13/1/10	VCS director (3)	Voluntary organisation in partnership with the City Council in one area of the city	Informal discussion
12/2/10	Council city wide youth worker (1)	City Council	Formal interview
16/2/10	Council city wide youth worker (2)	City Council	Formal interview
16/2/10	Council centre based youth worker (1)	City Council	Formal interview
22/2/10	Council Operations Manager	City Council	Formal interview
23/2/10	Council detached youth worker (1)	City Council	Formal interview
25/2/10	Council Senior youth worker (1)	City Council	Formal interview

26/2/10	Freelance consultant (1)	City Council and voluntary sector	Formal interview
26/2/10	VCS director (4)	Voluntary sector organisation focussing on NEET	Formal interview
1/3/10	VCS manager (1)	Local branch of Catch 22	Formal interview
1/3/10	Chief Inspector	Police	Formal interview
2/3/10	Sergeant	Police	Formal interview
2/3/10	Cabinet lead for Children and Young People	City Council	Formal interview
9/3/10	VCS manager (2)	Local Voluntary Action group	Formal interview
11/3/10	VCS director (5)	Voluntary sector organisation focussing on participation	Formal interview
11/3/10	Council detached youth worker (2)	City Council	Formal interview
11/3/10	Freelance consultant (2)	Voluntary sector and city council	Formal interview
12/3/10	Senior manager	Outdoor centre	Formal interview
12/3/10	Council Strategic participation lead	City Council	Formal interview
12/3/10	Youth Worker - sports	Private sports organisation	Formal interview
18/3/10	Council city wide youth worker	City Council	Formal interview
18/3/10	Council detached youth worker (3)	City Council	Formal interview
19/3/10	Council area manager (3)	City Council	Formal interview
19/3/10	VCS Youth worker (1)	Voluntary organisation in partnership with the City Council in one area of the city	Formal interview
22/3/10	Council centre based youth worker (2)	City Council	Formal interview
26/3/10	VCS director (2)	Local branch of Clubs for Young People	Formal interview
26/3/10	VCS director (6)	Grassroots voluntary sector organisation	Formal interview
30/3/10	Council centre based youth worker (3)	City Council	Formal interview
30/3/10	Participation co-ordinator	Connexions	Formal interview
1/4/10	VCS director (7)	Voluntary sector arts organisation	Formal interview
14/4/10	Council strategic manager (1) (of youth prevention pilot)	City Council	Formal interview
26/5/10	Council Area Manager (4)	City Council	Formal interview
28/5/10	VCS Youth worker (2)	Local branch of Clubs for Young People	Formal interview
28/5/10	Council senior Youth worker (2)	City Council	Formal interview
3/6/10	Council strategic manager	City Council	Formal interview

	(2) (for Integrated Services)		
10/6/10	Former Head of Youth Services	City Council	Formal interview
11/6/10	Council Area Manager (2)	City Council	Formal interview
5/8/10	Independent Consultant	Had previously worked on a report for the City Council	Formal interview
23/8/10	Interim Head of Youth Services and Youth Offending Team (subsequently Service Director)	City Council	Formal interview

APPENDIX 4: Meetings observed in the case study area during the fieldwork

Meeting	Purpose	Attendees	Status during fieldwork
IYSS – 13-19 sub group	Progress of IYSS Cabinet report Overview of different stages of IYSS work streams Planning for staff briefings on IYSS	IYSS consultant; Head of Change for Children; Head of Youth Services; Youth Services Operations Manager; Connexions; Extended Schools manager, rep from NHS; rep from local CVYS	Meeting regularly until Nov 09. 2 meetings cancelled and sub group would up in May 2010. Attended 2 meetings.
IYSS – Involving Young People sub group	Planning the involvement of young people in the IYSS strategy. Analysing results of the consultation with young people	IYSS consultant; CC strategic participation lead; CC city wide youth worker for involvement; Connexions participation worker; rep from local Voluntary Action group	No further meetings arranged after Dec 09. Attended 2 meetings.
IYSS – Youth Prevention Strategy	Overseeing the Youth prevention pilot	IYSS consultant; Head of Youth Services; pilot manager; Head of Youth Offending Team; Head of Drug and Alcohol Team; Extended Schools manager; Head of Change for Children	Met monthly throughout the duration of the pilot then cancelled from January 2010. Attended 2 meetings.
IYSS – NI 110 Working Group	Reviewing the way that data is collected for this indicator.	Strategic participation lead; rep from Soft Touch; CC officers involved in data collection	Met before start of fieldwork period. No further meetings scheduled
Youth Services Senior Management Team	Operational issues for the Youth Service	Head of Youth Services; Operations Manager; 4 area managers	Met every 2-4 weeks Attended 3 meetings in Spring 2010.
Youth Services city wide meeting	Briefing staff in the Service	All of the Youth Service	Supposed to meet four times a year. 1 scheduled.

			Attended in February 2010.
Youth Services Area meetings	Operational issues at a local area level.	Area manager, youth workers and rep from Clubs for Young People	Focussed on Area 3 – met every month. Attended 2 meetings
Youth Services PAYP allocation meetings	Deciding funding allocations from the PAYP budget	Operations Manager and Finance officer	Met before each school holiday funding period. Attended one meeting in Sept 09.
Participation network meetings	Information sharing, networking, developing participation across the city and sectors, presentations from different organisations on their participation work	CC strategic participation lead; some CC youth workers; VCS reps; NHS reps; Connexions; police	Met every 6 weeks. Attended 7 meetings during the fieldwork.